

OTHER TIMES, OTHER CUSTOMS? : ANALYSING THE  
'GESTA ROBERTI WISCARDI'

John William Titchen

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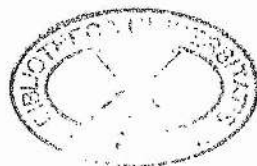
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**Other times, other customs?**  
**Analysing the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardii*.**

**PhD Thesis**

**John William Titchen**

September 2002





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## Abstract

This thesis approaches the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* as a means of gaining an insight into the cultural values of its author and intended audience. A detailed study is made of the various role models within the poem: the ideal soldier, the good lord, the role of women in society, and the perception of priests and the papacy. In addition to this the text is used to establish racial stereotypes for the following groups of peoples: the Germans, Sicilians, Seljuqs, Greeks, Italians, Venetians and Normans. The significance of the characterisation of individuals who are portrayed in a manner inconsistent with their racial stereotype is also examined. The thesis reexamines the evidence in the text and in other document sources concerning the author of the poem and establishes a viable identification. A new interpretation of the role of the two patrons, Urban II and Roger Borsa, is also discussed. The question of the consistency of style in William of Apulia's poem is also addressed and set in the context of the subject matter and intent of the work. Finally a discussion is made of the evidence for the use of William as a source by three subsequent historians: Robert of Torigni, Suger of St Denis and Anna Comnena. This thesis draws attention to further use of the *Gesta* by Robert than previously realised and for the first time forwards a concrete case for its use by the latter two authors.

## Declarations

I, John William Titchen, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 79,200 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

date *22<sup>nd</sup> September '02* signature of candidate

I was admitted as a research student in September 1998 and as a candidate for the higher degree of PhD. in September 1999; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St. Andrews between 1999 and 2002.

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I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of PhD. in the University of St. Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

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## List of abbreviations used within the text

<b>AC</b>	Anna Comnena, <i>Alexiad</i> , trans., E.R.A. Sewter (Penguin Classics, 1969).
<b>DsQ</b>	Dudo of St Quentin, <i>History of the Normans</i> , trans., E. Christiansen (Woodbridge, 1998).
<b>GF</b>	<i>Anonymi, Gesta Francorum et Aliorum Hierosolimitanorum</i> , ed., trans., R. Hill (Oxford, 1962).
<b>M</b>	Gaufredo Malaterra, <i>De rebus Gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae Comitis et Roberti Guiscardi Ducis fratris eius</i> , in ed., E. Pontieri, <i>Rerum Italicarum Scriptores</i> , Vol. V, Part I (Bologna, 1925 - 28).
<b>OV</b>	Orderic Vitalis, <i>Gesta Normanorum Ducum</i> , in ed., trans., E. Van Houts, <i>The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigni</i> , Volumes I & II (Oxford, 1992, 1995).
<b>RHC</b>	Recueil des Historiens des Croisades RHC Oc.: Historiens Occidentaux.
<b>RM</b>	Robert the Monk of Reims, RHC Oc.3.
<b>RT</b>	Robert of Torigni, <i>Gesta Normanorum Ducum</i> , in ed., trans., E. Van Houts, <i>The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigni</i> , Volumes I & II (Oxford, 1992, 1995).
<b>Suger</b>	Suger of St Denis, <i>The Deeds of Louis the Fat</i> , trans., R.C. Cusimano & J. Moorhead (Washington, 1992).
<b>WA</b>	William of Apulia, <i>Gesta Roberti Wiscardi</i> , in Guillaume de Pouille, <i>La Geste de Robert Guiscard</i> , ed., trans., M. Mathieu (Palermo, 1961).
<b>WM</b>	William of Malmesbury, <i>Gesta regum Anglorum</i> , ed., trans., R.A.B. Mynors, R.M. Thomson & M. Winterbottom, Vol I (Oxford, 1998).
<b>WP</b>	William of Poitiers, <i>Gesta Guillelmi</i> , ed., trans., M. Chibnall & R.H.C. Davis (Oxford, 1998).
<b>Leib</b>	Anne Comnène, <i>Alexiade</i> , Tome I - III, ed., trans., Bernard Leib (Paris, 1967).

**Mathieu**

Guillaume de Pouille, *La Geste de Robert Guiscard*, ed., trans., M. Mathieu (Palermo, 1961).

**Wolf**

Wolf, K., *Making History: The Normans and their Historians in eleventh century Italy* (Philadelphia, 1995).

## Introduction

The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* of William of Apulia is a fascinating text, not only for its content, but also in the way that it has been largely neglected by modern historians. Following the sixteenth century *princeps* edition of Jean Tirème<sup>1</sup> the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the poem transcribed into no less than five separate editions; those of Leibniz,<sup>2</sup> Caruso,<sup>3</sup> Muratori,<sup>4</sup> Wilmans<sup>5</sup> and Grande,<sup>6</sup> but in the last century (which has seen many scholars take a fresh look at medieval manuscripts) only one edition and translation was produced, that of the French scholar Mathieu,<sup>7</sup> and references to William's work outside of these tracts (and in particular reference to any transcription other than the Mathieu edition) are rare.

One of the first historians of the twentieth century to comment on William of Apulia was the great French scholar, Chalandon, who wrote in 1907.<sup>8</sup> Before looking at the words of the author, it is perhaps more expedient to observe how they were written, for they almost set the trend for the following seventy years. Chalandon's narrative relates, as the title suggests, the fascinating tale of the Normans in Italy and Sicily, but all that he has to say on William, whom this thesis will reveal as one of the most important

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<sup>1</sup>J. Tirème, *Guillelmi Apuliensis Rerum in Italia ac Regno Neapolitano Normanicarum libri quinque*, a Joanne Tiremeo editi. Rothomagi apud Richardum Petit et Richardum l'Allemant (1582).

<sup>2</sup>Leibniz, 'Guillelmi Appuli Historica Poema de Rebus Normannorum in Sicilia, Appulia et Calabria gestis usque ad mortem Roberti Guiscardi Ducis ad filium Rogerium' in *Scriptores Rerum Brunsvicensium*, Vol. XXXIX (Hannover, 1707).

<sup>3</sup>G.B. Caruso, 'Guillelmi Apuliensis Rerum in Apulia, Campania, Calabria et Sicilia Normanicarum libri quinque' in *Bibliotheca Historica Regni Siciliae*, Vol. I (Palermo, 1723).

<sup>4</sup>L. Muratori, *Guillelmi Appuli Historicum Poema de rebus Normannorum in Sicilia, Appulia et Calabria gestis usque ad mortem Roberti Guiscardi Ducis scriptum ad filium Rogerium*, in ed., E. Pontieri, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, Vol. V, Part I (Bologna, 1925 - 28).

<sup>5</sup>R. Wilmans, 'Guillermi Apuliensis: Gesta Roberti Wiscardi' in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores*, Vol. IX (Hannover, 1851).

<sup>6</sup>S. Grande, 'I Normanni, Poema Storico di Guglielmo Pugliese' in *Cronache e Diplomi del secolo XI e XII. Traduzione dal latino con note e prefazione* (Lecce, 1867).

<sup>7</sup>Mathieu.

<sup>8</sup>F. Chalandon, *Histoire de la domination Normande en Italie et en Sicile*, Volume One (Paris, 1907).



narrative sources of all, is summed up in a page and a half in the foreword of the text. Despite this Chalandon was quite complimentary towards William as an historian, noting that "it is thanks to him that we know in detail not only the Norman conquest, but also the manner in which Robert Guiscard came to impose his authority and united in a single state the diverse petty principalities founded by the Normans."<sup>9</sup>

It was not until half a century later that William was at last given detailed consideration by an historian, and perhaps his most thorough assessment yet, when Mathieu published her French translation of the *Gesta*. Like that of Chalandon, Mathieu's account is generally favourable to William. She noted that his impartiality was remarkable and that "one generally receives accuracy and truthfulness from William of Apulia."<sup>10</sup> In the foreword to her translation Mathieu devoted sections to William, the previous editions, the manuscripts, the language, the poem as literature, the use of epic language, the historical value of the *Gesta*, and the dating of the poem. Mathieu's edition provided the first translation and transcription to show all the varieties in the surviving manuscripts, but her analysis of the content of William's work was concise and limited to his style and historical accuracy.

While Mathieu was brief in her treatment of William, her new publication was not followed by a more detailed and thorough examination. Eight years later David Douglas made passing reference to the work, noting that "between 1095 and 1099, or very shortly afterwards, William styled 'of Apulia' (about whom nothing personal is known, but was probably a Norman living in Italy), composed, in admirably correct Latin, an epic poem

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<sup>9</sup>"C'est grâce à lui que nous connaissons avec détail non seulement la conquête normande, mais aussi la manière dont Robert Guiscard est arrivé à imposer son autorité et à réunir en un seul État les diverses petites principautés fondées par les Normands." Chalandon, *Op. Cit.* (1907), page XL.

<sup>10</sup>"On reconnaît généralement à Guillaume de Pouille l'exactitude et la véracité." Mathieu, page 26.

on the deeds of Robert Guiscard".<sup>11</sup> It was not until 1975 that a more detailed exposition appeared, from Italy, by Fuiano, in his work on mediaeval and classical history writing. Fuiano concentrated on the subject matter of the *Gesta*, but was rather vague in linking his conclusions to specific extracts of the text. He described the *Gesta* as "wholly a glorification of the valiant adventurers coming from the north, notwithstanding the heavy expressions of condemnation for their avidity; expressions a tad generic and in relation to his (William's) moralistic attitude".<sup>12</sup> The majority of Fuiano's section on the *Gesta* is devoted to comparing its description of events with that of the *Alexiad*; a monotony of quotations aimed at establishing an accurate narrative of events which does little to educate the reader about either the historian or the text. Almost a decade later the reputable Italian historian Delogu, discussing the text in much the same style as Chalandon, commented that the *Gesta* "is absolutely fundamental for the reconstruction of the Apulian situation and its relations with the Byzantine Empire."<sup>13</sup> The importance of the *Gesta* has received equal recognition in the Anglophone world in the last decade; Graham Loud described it as "by far the most detailed Latin source for these events" when discussing the 1081-5 Balkan campaign of Robert Guiscard,<sup>14</sup> while Kenneth Wolf, in his short work on the history writing of the Southern Italian Normans in the late eleventh century, praised William's strengths but noted wryly that "if the *Gesta* were the only source we had for Norman-papal relations in this period, the Apulian Normans would have been remembered as dutiful sons of the Church."<sup>15</sup> William has always been

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<sup>11</sup>D.C. Douglas, *The Norman Achievement 1050-1100* (London 1969), page 17.

<sup>12</sup>"Il suo poema è tutto un'esaltazione dei prodi avventurieri venuti dal nord, nonostante le gravi espressioni di condanna per la loro avidità; espressioni piuttosto generiche e in intimo accordo col suo atteggiamento moraleggiante." M. Fuiano, *Studi di Storiografia Medioevale ed Umanistica* (Naples, 1975), page 4.

<sup>13</sup>"È tuttavia fondamentale per la ricostruzione delle situazioni pugliesi e dei rapporti con l'impero bizantino." P. Delogu, *I Normanni in Italia: Cronache della conquista e del regno* (Naples, 1984), page 268.

<sup>14</sup>G.A. Loud, 'Anna Comnena and her sources for the Normans of Southern Italy', in *Church and Chronicle in the Middle Ages. Essays presented to John Taylor* (1991), page 47.

<sup>15</sup>Wolf, page 134. This portrayal of the relationship between the Normans and the Church served a very important purpose, as much for the Church as the Normans, as will be illustrated in Chapter IV below.

given a fair degree of respect by those who have commented upon him, but the *Gesta* is more often cited as an anecdotal aside than subjected to detailed analysis.

The quality of the Latin verse in the *Gesta* has ensured that it is regarded as a piece of literature as well as a history. Muratori described William as “a poet superior to the majority of his contemporaries, and his work one of the best epic histories of the time, through its clarity, simplicity, its skilful verse and lack of affectation, its classicism without slavish imitation, and, throughout the passage, a certain elegance and liveliness.”<sup>16</sup> Chalandon also praised William’s style, describing the *Gesta* as “written in very elegant verse, in an educated form of Latin. When one compares it with sections in verse of the chronicle of Malaterra, the latter author does not have the advantage.”<sup>17</sup> The English historian Norwich, in his flowing narrative account of the deeds of the Normans in the Mediterranean basin, was particularly taken by William’s hexameters, describing them as elegant, racy and relentless.<sup>18</sup>

Examining the history of the historiography of William of Apulia it would thus seem that despite being lauded as one of the most valuable sources surviving, as the small number of references above illustrate, his work has been largely been neglected. The reason for this is that the emphasis of William’s *Gesta* is considerably different to that of his western contemporaries - for his work seems to be more concerned with the relations between the Normans and the Greeks, as part of an epic struggle for supremacy, rather

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<sup>16</sup>“...s’accordent à reconnaître en lui un poète supérieur à la moyenne de ses contemporains, et dans son œuvre une des meilleures épopées historiques du temps, par sa clarté, sa simplicité, sa versification habile et pas trop maniérée, son classicisme sans imitations serviles et, par endroits, quelque élégance et quelque vivacité.” cf. Muratori in Mathieu, page 56.

<sup>17</sup>“L’œuvre est écrite en vers élégants, en un latin correct. Quand on la compare aux parties en vers de la chronique de Malaterra, l’avantage n’est pas à ce dernier auteur.” F. Chalandon, *Op. Cit.* (1907), page XL.

<sup>18</sup>J.J. Norwich, *The Normans in the South 1016-1130* (1967) in *The Normans in Sicily* (Penguin, 1992), pages 9, 92 and 179.

than southern Italian politics. This is the prime cause for the relative paucity of work on William and the *Gesta*.

If the orientation of the *Gesta* is Greek, why has so little attention been paid to it by Byzantine historians? The era which is the subject of William's poem was one of extreme turmoil, both internal and external, for the Byzantine Empire. While the loss of Byzantine Italy was important to the empire (in terms of imperial prestige), one of the reasons for its loss was that Greek attention was focused elsewhere. The empire suffered from dynastic strife and uncertainty throughout the eleventh century which were exacerbated by the growing turmoil on its rapidly shrinking eastern frontier. Just as these matters took priority over western relations for Byzantine strategists at the time, they have taken equal priority for modern Byzantinists endeavouring to study the period. Although William's account of the Balkans campaign against Alexius I Comnenus is probably the best available, that of the Byzantine emperor's daughter Anna Comnena has been more accessible for a corpus of historians more conversant with Greek than Latin.<sup>19</sup> The *Gesta* has been largely viewed by Byzantinists as purely a southern Italian history, and thus in the realm of Western Mediaevalists.

Ironically this compartmentalism is viewed in reverse by Western Mediaeval historians. William's Greek orientation and gloss over the internal struggles that formed the gradual rise of the Normans (and particularly the Hautevilles) to power has resulted in a relative disregard for the usefulness of the *Gesta* as a source for the history of the era. The majority of Western Mediaevalists studying southern Italy in the eleventh century have focused on the relationships amongst the northern infiltrators and the struggle for dominance between the established Lombard dynasties and the newcomers. As a

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<sup>19</sup>This is not intended as a criticism. Conversely few west European Mediaevalists have Greek.

historical source William's poem has therefore been supplanted by the chronicles of Geoffrey Malaterra and Amatus (and his redactor Leo of Ostia). These works have been more suited to forming a chronology of events for the history of the Normans in the south and provide far more information about the internal politics of the peninsula. While the *Gesta* provides sketches of most of the major events in the south, its long silences and absolute absence of dates combined with its tendency to view the Norman conquest as a struggle between the Normans and the Greeks have ensured its neglect.

William's work has been further overshadowed by its chronological setting, detailing events just prior to the First Crusade. This major turning point in European history and its aftermath overshadows to a large extent the events of the preceding decades. While the First Crusade would appear to unite the respective fields of Byzantine and west European Mediaeval history, with few exceptions the two camps remain firmly polarised in their interpretations; each siding with its respective geographical orientation to blame the other for the negative aspects of the movement. While William's work is contemporary with the First Crusade, because his subject matter precedes it, his poem has been ignored as a source for comparisons between the respective mores and perceptions of East and West at this moment of massed congregation. William of Apulia is perhaps unique in that he inhabits that shadowy horizon where Byzantine and Western Mediaeval studies meet, but do not touch.

This study of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* will illustrate that despite its inadequacies in its ability to provide us with dates, its wealth of information is such that it should be regarded as one of the most important works of its day and given greater attention as an historical source. In the following chapters a new interpretation of the *Gesta* will be outlined, showing how its conception was a product of the combined interests of

northern European, southern Italian and Byzantine politics. The poem's setting in the melting cultural pot of the southern Italian peninsula makes it a thesaurus of information on the perceptions of its author and intended audience of the different racial groups of the east and west at the time of the First Crusade. While characterisation is central to what we might regard as the identity of a people, ethnicity does not lie there alone for a people cannot be regarded as such without the identity of a name. As Robert Bartlett rightly pointed out "ethnic characterization accompanied ethnic labelling"<sup>20</sup> and thus as well as discussing the characteristics associated with the different peoples who exist within the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* a study will be made of the precise names by which William has chosen to identify them, and what may be learnt from this. Within any chronicle it is possible to observe trends in the behaviour of the subjects therein, which actions bring profit to the propagator, and the obverse. The epic theme of the rise to power of the Normans (and in particular the Hautevilles) of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* naturally influences what areas of life William of Apulia chose to depict: the military, nobility and the clergy. In this sense, through the exclusion of the common people as irrelevant, his work might seem to distort the three estates common to mediaeval thought, but in many ways it simply shows how uneven the balance of those three became in the inherently unstable equilibrium of a frontier society. Despite the narrowness of William's depiction of his environment there are many instances where through his praise and condemnation the role models for those elements of society that he deemed important can be identified and examined. The relationship between the poem and subsequent historical writing will also be illustrated through an examination of three authors, two in the West and one in the East, who can be proved to have used the *Gesta* as a source for their own chronicles. William's poem may not provide us with any dates, but as this study shows, it does something far more useful and relevant to our own times by providing us with a snapshot

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<sup>20</sup>R. Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: conquest, colonization and cultural change 950 - 1350* (Penguin, 1993), page 101.

of the ideals and stereotypes of a society in the midst of racial integration and cultural change.



# I

## Author and Aegis

### Dating the Text

William of Apulia saw fit not to include any dates in his poem, yet we are fortunate that there are many oblique references to people and events in the *Gesta* which allow us to narrow down any margins of error considerably. The preface of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* dedicated the work to Duke Roger Borsa of Apulia, “son and proper heir of the Duke Robert”<sup>1</sup> and the otherwise anonymous *Guillemus Apuliensis*<sup>2</sup> recorded that there were two motivating forces behind his composition: his wish to serve Roger’s authority, and the request of Urban II not to be sluggish.<sup>3</sup> Since Urban’s pontificate lasted from 1088 to July 1099 the inception of the composition of this work may comfortably be set within this period. For dating purposes the importance of the omission of any dedication to Urban II in the epilogue depends upon the interpretation of Urban’s role in William’s composition. The words of the author, “the request of reverend Father Urban forbids me to be sluggish”<sup>4</sup> suggest that Urban was very keen for a speedy completion of the work, indicating in turn that his patronage was as instrumental as that of Roger in its inception and that he had a particular agenda for the poem. Marguerite Mathieu, in her edition and translation of the text, the most recent to date, did not attach any particular significance to the absence of any mention of Urban II in the epilogue, believing that it would be out of place with its tone which is essentially a polite

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<sup>1</sup> ‘*ducis Roberti dignaque proles*’ WA, Preface, line VII, page 98.

<sup>2</sup>Henceforth referred to as William of Apulia.

<sup>3</sup>WA, Preface, lines VIII - XIII, page 98.

<sup>4</sup>‘*et patris Urbani reverenda petitio segnem esse vetat*’ WA, Preface, lines XI - XII, page 98.



request for payment.<sup>5</sup> This is a somewhat circular argument because William's tone was governed by his audience, an epilogue intended for both patrons would have been penned differently than that for a single benefactor. Indeed it could be argued that the death of one patron would make an author more insistent on receiving payment or promotion of some kind from the other. Thus the omission of Urban's name strongly suggests that he did not live to see the poem's completion and it is possible to assume that William wrote and submitted his epilogue after the news of Urban's death had reached him. The death of Roger Borsa in 1111 provides an absolute upper limit to the completion of the *Gesta*.

The dates of the two patrons thus give us a broad canvas of 1088 - 1111, but it is possible to ascribe greater definition to the dates relating to the possible penning of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, and this has been done by a number of historians, notably its most recent editor, Marguerite Mathieu, who paid attention to the references to Jordan of Capua, an alliance between a son (or pretender) of Romanus Diogenes, the Seljuqs and the Armenians, and the First Crusade.<sup>6</sup> The first book of the *Gesta* makes reference to Richard, son of Jordan of Capua in such wise:

Now a young man, he bears the very worthy powers of a man.<sup>7</sup>

According to Malaterra, Richard II of Capua rebelled against his father Jordan as a *pusillus* (youth) in 1090, and reached *ad intellegibilem aetatem* (the age of discretion) in 1098.<sup>8</sup> Thus we may place William's penning of these lines in the first book of the *Gesta* before 1098.

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<sup>5</sup>Mathieu, page 13.

<sup>6</sup>Mathieu, pages 11 - 13.

<sup>7</sup>*Iamque viro vires condignas fert adolescens.* WA, I, line 179, page 108.

<sup>8</sup>M, IV, xxvi, lines 17 - 19, page 104. My attempts to decipher Richard's exact age from these snippets of information are inexact. The connotations associated with Malaterra's *pusillus* are that of a very small boy - possible if we take the 'age of discretion' as his reaching the next stage of *adolescens*, defined by Livy as 15 - 30. If William was applying the same criteria then this comment is of no use to us for dating the *Gesta*, since he could be writing at any time from 1098 - 1113. William's words

In Book Three of the *Gesta* William described how

the son of Romanus joined to him as allies the Armenians and Persians, and from the empire of those men (Michael VII Ducas and his brother Constantine) he carried away the lands of the rising sun, ravaging with the sword and fire.<sup>9</sup>

Here William is in error, for no such revolt took place during the reign of Michael VII. However in the reign of Alexius I Comnenus, William's contemporary, a pretender claiming to be the son of Romanus Diogenes allied with the Seljuqs and Armenians and attempted to supplant the Byzantine Emperor. This must surely be the event to which the *Gesta* refers, inserted here to explain the loss of lands in the east by the empire as divine retribution for the crime committed against Romanus Diogenes. This rebellion against Alexius took place through 1094 - 1095 and so we may be certain that William was working on the third book of the *Gesta* after this date.

There is a further and more specific piece of chronological evidence provided by William in the third book of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* which gives greater clarification to the dating hinted by his mention of Richard of Capua and the rebellion against Alexius Comnenus. The third book following an account of the Battle of Mantzikert and the

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suggest that he is paying Richard a compliment, that Richard is definitely a boy (albeit one old enough to bear arms competently and so probably in his early teenage years) but has the abilities of a man. This distinction between an *adolescens* and *homo* suggests that in his use of the term he is not referring to the Roman method of grouping ages (in which the distinctions are generally between *pueritia*, *adulescentia*, *juventus*, *seniores* and *senectus*). Thus combining both Malaterra and William we may tentatively suggest that Richard turned 15 in 1098, but William distinguished this transition as between *adolescens* and *homo*, and thus wrote at some point in time before 1098. Lewis & Short, *Op. Cit.*, page 63.

<sup>9</sup>*namque sibi socios Romani filius addens*

*Armenios, Persas, terras Orientis eorum*

*Subtrahit imperio, ferro populatus et igni.* WA, III, lines 95 - 97, page 168.

rebellion of the 'son of Romanus', gives further details of the trials and tribulations of the Byzantine Empire, observing that

From that time the perfidious people of the Persians began to rise up against the Roman Empire in slaughter and pillage. It would not have been able to have been returned thus far subject to the laws of the empire unless the people of the Gauls, more powerful in the strengths of arms than every people, spurred on by celestial command were restoring it to freedom, having subdued that land from the enemy. These men were moved by God's design to open the holy roads of the Sepulchre now closed for a long time.<sup>10</sup>

Initially it appears that William may simply have been referring to the importance of the role of Gallic mercenaries in the Byzantine armies, but this interpretation is dispelled by his reference to the opening of the roads of the Holy Sepulchre, indicating that he is referring to the First Crusade. Michele Fuiano noted that William made use of the imperfect subjunctive when describing the Gallic campaign in the east, indicating an ongoing action which has not yet been achieved.<sup>11</sup> This suggestion is reinforced by William's failure to make any triumphant reference to the regaining of Jerusalem, which would have been perfectly reasonable either in the context of the above passage or his subsequent account of the conquest of Palermo, which he depicts as a Crusade. This

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<sup>10</sup>*Tempore Persarum gens perfida coepit ab illo  
In Romaniam consurgere caede, rapinis.  
Imperii nec adhuc redigi sub iura valeret,  
Gens nisi Gallorum, quae gente potentior omni  
Viribus armorum, nutu stimulata superno,  
Hanc libertati superato redderet hoste,  
Quae spirante Deo sanctas aperire Sepulcri  
Est animata vias longo iam tempore clausas.* WA, III, lines 98 - 105, pages 168 - 170.

<sup>11</sup>M. Fuiano, *Guglielmo di Puglia, storico di Roberto il Guiscardo*, in *Archivio Storico per le province napoletane*, LXXX (Nuova Serie, XXXII), 1950 - 51, page 22.

passage then gives further qualification to the dating provided by the reference to Richard II of Capua (pre 1098 for Book One) by placing the composition of the third book of the *Gesta* between the beginning of the movement of the main body of the Crusade across the Anatolian plain in April 1097 and the fall of Jerusalem in August 1099.

The three passages discussed above have long been used (with reference to the pontificate of Urban II) to date the composition of the *Gesta*, but there is strong evidence for a fourth dating point in the fifth and final book of William's poem. The predominant subject of the fourth and fifth books of the *Gesta* is the Balkans campaign of Robert Guiscard. The fourth book of the *Gesta* details the first part of the eastern expedition, including its successes and failures, and ends with Robert's triumphant return to Apulia and his rescue of Gregory VII from Henry IV's siege of Rome in May 1084. The fifth book marks a sudden change in continuity for William, for he decided to go back in time to May 1082 to tell the tale of how Boamund had pressed the campaign in his father's absence. There is also a marked shift in William's emphasis on the campaign - for the fifth book contains accounts of three land and one naval encounter between the Norman and Byzantine forces. Here the stress is clearly upon the military and tactical superiority of the Normans, and especially of the virtues of Boamund over the Byzantine Emperor Alexius. Even the portrayal of Alexius seems to shift in the fifth book and he changes from the able and generous warrior who rescued the empire from Nicephorus Botaneiates, who was keen to be respectful to Robert in the opening stages of the fourth book, to a cowardly ruler who fears to do battle and is no match for Boamund.<sup>12</sup>

We know that William wrote the first book of the *Gesta* before 1098 and that he composed the third book sometime between April 1097 and August 1099, certainly

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<sup>12</sup>The portrayal of the Alexius in the *Gesta* and its chronological significance is discussed in Chapter III.

completing the work after Urban's death in July 1099. This chronological setting provides a framework through which to view William's change in tone towards Alexius and his sudden concentration on the battles between Boamund and the Byzantine Emperor. On the 11th September 1098 the Crusaders wrote a letter to Urban II which criticised the behaviour of Alexius Comnenus and accused him of deliberately impeding the Crusade. At the same time the reputation of Boamund in the West would have been considerably elevated by accounts of his success as the overall military commander of the Crusading host. From this point until the Treaty of Devol in 1108 relations between Boamund and Alexius were to be poor. It is improbable that William's change in tone and sudden emphasis on Boamund at the start of the fifth book of the *Gesta* was not related to these events, thus the fifth book must have been written after the fall of Antioch in June 1098 and probably after the letter of the Crusaders of September of the same year. The usefulness of this identification is that it indicates (given that William wrote the third and fourth books between 1097 and 1098) that the date of the completion of the work cannot have been long after the death of Urban II.<sup>13</sup>

As far as can be ascertained from manuscript evidence, the last time that the two cited patrons of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* met prior to the First Crusade was at Monte Cassino in August 1093.<sup>14</sup> It may be that in the discussions of this meeting the idea of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, whose purpose, as I shall argue below, was to serve the Papacy as much as the political stability of the south, was born. If one accepts provisionally that Autumn 1099 was the date of the work's completion, and that William was writing the start of Book Three in the early summer of 1097, and starting the fifth book post

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<sup>13</sup>After the four battles mentioned above, book five consists of little more than an eulogy for Gregory VII and an account of the death of Robert Guiscard. Given William's skills as a poet, had Urban been dead when he wrote his eulogy of Gregory VII, it is likely that he would have linked the two together in equal spiritual brotherhood. As he did not, it is possible to conject that Urban was probably alive when those lines were composed.

<sup>14</sup>Giuseppe Crudo, *La s.s. Trinità di Venosa* (Trani, 1899), page 188.

September 1098, then August 1093 as a date of commission does not seem unfeasible. It allows the mysterious William of Apulia approximately two years to research and collate written and oral sources before beginning the laborious task of writing his work. In an age of instant communication this may seem like a tremendously long time, but it is important not to forget the limitations that the seasons imposed upon travel (there is no concrete evidence that William wrote in Apulia, even if he gained much of his material from Bari)<sup>15</sup> or that William may have had occupations and responsibilities other than the composition of epic history during those years.

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<sup>15</sup>Mathieu, page 27.

## Patrons

The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* is dedicated to Duke Roger Borsa in its preface and asks for recompense from the same ruler at its end, but William of Apulia also indicated that Pope Urban II had a strong interest in the completion of the work. Reading the text it is possible to look beyond the outline of southern Italian history sketched by the poet to a political message beneath, carefully designed to promote the interests of not only these two men, but also the families they represented.<sup>16</sup>

## Roger Borsa and the Hautevilles

In the Preface to the *Gesta* William expressed his desire to serve the authority of Roger Borsa, describing him as the “son and proper heir of the Duke Robert.”<sup>17</sup> This particular dedication, combined with William’s mention of Roger’s designation as heir by his father prior to the Balkans campaign, recently led Kenneth Wolf to postulate that

Indeed it is quite possible that Roger commissioned the *Gesta* with the intention of solidifying his claim to Apulia in the face of the ever-present challenge posed by his half-brother Bohemund.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Though in Urban II’s case this is the ‘family’ of the reform papacy rather than any genealogical group.

<sup>17</sup>‘...ducis Roberti dignaque proles.’ WA, Preface, line VII, page 98.

<sup>18</sup>Wolf, page 124.



The flaw in this theory is that it relies on a very outdated perception of the relationship between Roger Borsa and Boamund, and indeed on a characterisation of Boamund reliant purely on the bitter prejudice of the Byzantine historian Anna Comnena and modern historiography, which in turn has largely been dictated by Anna and the nineteenth-century romantic rumblings of Sir Francis Palgrave who even believed that Boamund was “the main author and promoter of the Crusade.”<sup>19</sup> It is true that there was a large degree of acrimony between Roger Borsa and Boamund following the death of Robert Guiscard in 1085 and the latter rebelled against his younger brother. However, after the settlement between the two brothers at Bari in 1089 which effectively divided their father’s inheritance between them, there is no evidence to suggest anything other than a complete reconciliation and acceptance of the current status quo between the two of them.<sup>20</sup> The rebellion of 1093 upon rumours of Roger’s death was swiftly put down by Roger along with his brother Boamund and Count Roger of Sicily.<sup>21</sup> It thus becomes difficult to imagine Roger commissioning the *Gesta* to promote his legitimacy against rival claims by his brother, as there is no evidence of any problems between the two of them after 1089.<sup>22</sup> The rebellion of 1093 saw an attempt to challenge the authority of Roger in a vacuum created by his perceived death, and the unity of action in response does not give credence to the theory that problems still remained between the two brothers. In the actions of first Boamund, and subsequently the two brothers and their uncle, it is possible to see a concerted effort to maintain the Hauteville grip over the south. This may be the key to Roger’s commissioning of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*.

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<sup>19</sup>Sir Francis Palgrave, *The History of Normandy and England* (London, 1851 - 1864), page 259.

<sup>20</sup>M, IV, IV, page 87.

<sup>21</sup>M, IV, XXI - XXII, pages 99 - 101.

<sup>22</sup>When Roger was rumoured to have died, a number of his vassals rebelled. Boamund for his part was quick to seize Roger’s fortresses in Calabria on the pretext or not of respecting the rights of his brother’s heirs. Boamund hastened to Melfi and submitted these back to Roger’s control immediately upon hearing of his brother’s recovery before accompanying him and Roger of Sicily on a campaign to put out the remaining flames of rebellion. Boamund’s actions thus suggest that his priority was the maintenance of Hauteville authority on the peninsula rather than mere opportunist land seizure.



If William was attempting to promote Roger Borsa alone then his poem might be expected to stress the legitimacy of his succession and to find a way to praise the martial qualities of the present Duke, but it is clear that he goes further than this, and extols the virtues of Southern Italy's three senior Hauteville magnates: Duke Roger Borsa, Count Roger of Sicily, and Boamund of Bari.

Roger Borsa's virtues are acclaimed on a number of occasions. William recorded how his reputation was such that Amicus II, Count of Molfetta, was compelled to break his siege of Giovenazzo after his army fled upon hearing the false rumour that Roger was approaching to relieve it.<sup>23</sup> This incident promotes Roger's reputation in several ways. Firstly it serves as a reminder that Robert Guiscard had enough confidence in his son to give him command of a large body of troops. Secondly it indicates that Roger's reputation was such that the experienced Amicus chose to flee rather than risk either siege or battle. Thirdly (and this is confirmed elsewhere in the poem) it suggests that Roger was not the sort of man who took kindly to opposition and that the consequences of being caught afterwards could be dire.

William did not merely remind his audience of the possibilities that action by Roger might cause, he was also careful to relate episodes which illustrated the impressive personal traits that the Apulian Duke had inherited from his illustrious father. At the naval battle of Corfu Roger

wounded in the upper arm stood fighting the enemy, unable to surrender,  
forgetting his wound.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>WA, III, 553 - 566, page 194.

<sup>24</sup>*...et ipse lacerto*

and

actively took pains to be a follower of his father's skill at arms, and to be kind and affable to everyone.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore William took pains to show Roger as a good lord, mindful of his obligations to his men, deciding to visit his men in person to inform them of his father's death rather than abandon them:

"On no account," he said, "would the people left at the siege be obliged to call my word faithful if I left without revisiting their camp and telling them of my father's death, which I told you, and of my own departure."<sup>26</sup>

Finally, as a warning to those who might seek to rebel against him, the *Gesta* related how brutally Roger Borsa tortured those who had imprisoned him at Troia:

He had one man's hand cut off, and another's foot, a third lost his nose, another lost his testicles; he deprived some men of their teeth and others of their ears. Thus a captive tigress is often accustomed to hide her anger as while captured she is unable to vent her rage, but if she is strong enough to leave by breaking the bars, she displays unusual fury because she

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*Saucius obstanti stat cedere nescius hosti,  
Immemor illati sibi vulneris...*' WA, V, lines 170 - 172, page 244.

<sup>25</sup>*'Qui patris esse sequax armorum strenuitate  
Et placida cunctis affabilitate studebat.'* WA, V, lines 145 - 146, page 244.

<sup>26</sup>*'... "Nullius, ait, fidei me iure vocare  
Deberet populus dimissus in obsidione,  
Abscedens eius si castra revisere nollem  
Et patris interitum, quem vobis notificavi  
Discessumque meum non illis notificarem."*' WA, V, lines 354 - 358, pages 254 - 256.

devours and tears everything she sees; the lion himself running takes refuge from the enraged animal, although she is smaller in body and he the stronger.<sup>27</sup>

Count Roger of Sicily, Roger Borsa's uncle, plays an essentially peripheral role in the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, but William chose to stress the importance of his campaigns across the sea in comparison with Robert Guiscard's adventures and while paying tribute to his success in conquering the majority of Sicily noted that

Roger was less in that time of life, not in courage. None of the brothers of that man, howsoever distinguished, entered into as noble a war.<sup>28</sup>

The *Gesta* stressed that the motivation behind Roger's military campaigns was his desire for everyone to be Christian and that fighting pagans was noble, recording that Roger spent most of his youth engaged in that task and did not relent until he had subdued all of Sicily.<sup>29</sup> William was careful to point out before his triumphant account of the siege of Palermo that the majority of Sicily had already been conquered by Robert's brother Roger. In many respects Roger enjoyed much stronger authority than his nephews on the peninsula because the majority of his territory had been gained by right of conquest, but

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<sup>27</sup>...*Huic manus, illi  
Pes erat abscisus; hunc naso, testibus illum  
Privat; dentibus hos, deformat et auribus illos.  
Saepe solet captae sic tigridis ira latenter,  
Dum nullos agitare potest inclusa furores,  
Quae si forte valet ruptis excedere claustris,  
Quod videt omne vorat, rapit, insolitumque furem  
Exerit; occursus leo perfugit ipse furentis,  
Quamvis ista minor sit corpore, fortior ille.* WA, IV, lines 515 - 523, page 232.

<sup>28</sup>...*Erat hoc aetate Rogerus  
Non virtute minor; nullus de fratribus eius  
Quamlibet egregius inuit tam nobile bellum.* WA, III, lines 196 - 198, page 174.

<sup>29</sup>WA, III, lines 193 - 204, page 174. The significance of William's stress on the holy nature of the war against the Sicilians is discussed with relevance to Urban II in this chapter below and with regard to William's portrayal of the Sicilians in Chapter III.

he still had significant lands in Calabria where reminders of his reputation as a fighting man might well have been useful. It is worth noting therefore that the poem attributes Robert's confidence at Palermo not just to his army, but also to the reassuring presence and experience of his younger brother:

The Duke, relying firmly in the alliance of that man with him and in the great army he had brought with him, did not despair of the siege and conquering of Palermo, which he had heard was the most noble of the cities of Sicily.<sup>30</sup>

The argument that Roger Borsa commissioned the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* as a means of asserting his own authority over his elder half brother, Boamund, is not supported by William's enthusiastic account of the deeds and personal qualities of this able Hauteville general. The Crusading 'Prince' is first described as "a vigorous offspring who would become powerful and distinguished in courage beyond measure"<sup>31</sup> and later as "a knight of great soul" (*magnae mentis eques*).<sup>32</sup> Boamund's courage is amply shown through William's account of his generalship of the Balkans campaign in Books Four and Five, and his nature most clearly illustrated following the loss of his baggage at Larissa:

he was not the least afraid and strove to join up with his separated comrades; no setback could frighten the soul of that man.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>*Hoc sibi dux socio confisus et agmine multo  
Secum deducto non obsidione Panormum  
Vincere desperat, Siculis quam nobiliorem  
Urbibus audierat.* WA, III, lines 204 - 207, page 174.

<sup>31</sup>*...strenua proles,  
Insignis nimia virtute potensque futurus.* WA, II, lines 422- 423, page 154.

<sup>32</sup>WA, IV, line 208, page 214.

<sup>33</sup>*Nil tamen ipse pavens, comites sibi dissociatos  
Associare studet; nequeunt incommoda mentem  
Perterrere viri.* WA, V, lines 53 - 55, page 238.

In many respects Boamund is actually the hero of Book V of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, a role which challenges the idea that William was trying to promote Roger as the 'proper heir' against the claims of Boamund.<sup>34</sup> As illustrated above, by the time of the *Gesta's* commissioning and writing there is no reason to suppose that either brother was challenging the authority of the other, so we should look elsewhere to understand William's words. Thus it may be seen that through his account William is not endeavouring to bolster Roger's reputation at the expense of his elder half brother, but instead is stressing the virtues of both men, promoting the strength of the authority of both, but also reinforcing the dignity of the Hauteville family as a whole on the Southern peninsula.<sup>35</sup> William's patrons recognised that the strength of the south depended upon the unity of the Hauteville family, and thus to laud one son over the other would not necessarily be productive. The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi's* initial stress on Roger's being the "son and proper heir" to Robert Guiscard might be implying that Robert's *sons* were the proper heirs to his authority, thus the phrase (and indeed the poem) may be aimed at those who felt themselves entitled to be heirs to the Duke's authority but were not Robert Guiscard's sons. To understand this it is important to look at William's portrayal of the rest of the Hauteville family, Roger Borsa's uncles and cousins.

It is probably significant that Robert Guiscard is introduced in the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* as the brother of the first of the Hauteville Counts, William 'Iron Arm'. The Hauteville clan appear in the poem as part of William's description of Maniaces' rebellion against Constantine IX Monomachus. In discussing the Norman support for Argyro against Maniaces, William recorded that

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<sup>34</sup>The promotion of Boamund is linked to the overall design of the work, however his position as the de facto hero of Book V can be linked to the probable influence of contemporary events upon William. This is discussed in the context of racial stereotyping and its exceptions at the end of Chapter III.

<sup>35</sup>A theory concerning the motivation behind this portrayal will be outlined below.

William the son of Tancred was the greatest hope of these men...

...The noble name of William terrified the Greeks, because that man was strong he was said to have an iron arm; for he had powerful strength and spirit. Robert, who was later selected as Duke, known by all as Guiscard - the fore knowing - was the brother of that man.<sup>36</sup>

This passage serves several purposes. Firstly it introduces the Hautevilles to southern Italian history. Secondly it stresses that they are fighting against Maniaces, thus they are being depicted as opposing an usurper to rightful Imperial authority who has already been portrayed as an evil man through William's descriptions of the atrocities he committed upon children. Thirdly the *Gesta* establishes that even at this early stage William de Hauteville was looked up to by his fellow Normans. Finally the poem connects Robert Guiscard with William at this point, ensuring that a direct connection is made between the two of them. Interestingly the *Gesta* does not make a link here between William and the two other brothers who succeeded him, Humphrey and Drogo. These two brothers are mentioned in connection with William's premature death, which the *Gesta* describes as a great loss:

...some associated with the Count Peter and others with Drogo son of Tancred: because William - the man said to have an iron arm - the brother of that man had lived for a short time; had he been permitted to live no

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<sup>36</sup> '...Tancredi filius, horum

Maxima spes, aderat Guillermus ad arma paratus...

...Terrebat Danaos Guillemi nobile nomen;

Is quia fortis erat, est ferrea dictus habere

Brachia, nam validas vires animumque gerebat.

Huius Robertus frater fuit ille, ducatum

Qui post optinuit. Guiscardus ad omnia prudens.' WA, I, lines 520 - 521, 524 - 528, page 126.

poet would have been able to draw forth his praises, he was so great in modesty of mind, so animated in excellence.<sup>37</sup>

As one Hauteville exits the *Gesta* another is introduced by William, illustrating the continuity of Hauteville power and authority. One interesting facet of the poem is that Drogo de Hauteville receives very little attention from William of Apulia and no praise whatsoever. William's description of Drogo's assassination is underscored by criticism, since he had been killed

by the natives because he trusted those men too much.<sup>38</sup>

Of greater curiosity is the manner in which William mentions Drogo and Humphrey together, for Humphrey is always mentioned as if he were the senior of the two men. The *Gesta* noted that

All the people of Italy feared Humphrey with his brother Drogo<sup>39</sup>

and later noted of Count Peter of Andria that

the Count Humphrey with his brother Drogo overthrew his great spirit.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *'Pars comiti Petro, pars est sociata Drogoni  
Tancredi genito: modico quia vixerat eius  
Tempore germanus, vir ferrea dictus habere  
Brachia Guilermus, cui vivere si licuisset,  
Nemo poeta suas posset depromere laudes,  
Tanta fuit probitas animi, tam vivida virtus.* WA, II, lines 21 - 26, page 132.

<sup>38</sup> *'...ab indigenis, nimium quia credulus illis.'* WA, II, line 78, page 136.

<sup>39</sup> *'Umfredum totus cum fratre Drogone tremebat  
Italiae populus...'* WA, II, lines 27 - 28, page 132.

<sup>40</sup> *'Sed comes Unfredus cum fratre Drogone superbam  
Deponunt mentem...'* WA, II, lines 33 - 34, pages 132 - 134.

In William's eyes Humphrey clearly took precedence, even though at the time of the events he was describing Drogo was Count.<sup>41</sup>

William describes the presence of both Humphrey and Robert at the battle of Civitate, but it is Robert in whose physical prowess he exults and the *Gesta* stresses that he

surpassed the earlier brothers with great souled courage<sup>42</sup>

After the battle William describes the reprisals visited upon the Apulians that Humphrey believed were responsible for Drogo's death.<sup>43</sup> The greatest indication of Humphrey's character which indicates why he was so feared comes in an account of the Apulian Count and Robert having dinner together. Humphrey, perhaps concerned about Robert's level of success in Calabria, had Robert seized during a meal:

He was captured by Humphrey while eating with him - he wished to stand up to his brother with a sword, but Goscelin held the restrained man with his hands. He was then consigned to the guards...<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>William was certainly not in any doubt as to the order of the two men since he subsequently describes Humphrey as succeeding Drogo. What William may be expressing therefore is the possibility that Humphrey was the 'power behind the throne' during his elder brother's period of office. Drogo may have commanded respect because he was backed by his brother Humphrey. This assessment of Humphrey tallies with William's brief references to the Italians fearing Humphrey and is supported by the *Gesta*'s account of Humphrey's vicious reprisals following Drogo's assassination.

<sup>42</sup>'...qui magnanima virtute priores  
Transcendit fratres.' WA, II, lines 127 - 128, page 138.

<sup>43</sup>WA, II, lines 287 - 291, page 148.

<sup>44</sup>'Captus ab Unfredo secum prandente, volebat  
In fratrem gladio consurgere, sed Goscelinus  
Compressum manibus teuit; custodibus inde  
Traditur...' WA, II, lines 314 - 317, page 148.



Although Humphrey subsequently reinstated Robert with the territories the latter had won, William's description of the event indicates that this was no friendly disagreement. The passage is quite specific: Humphrey assaulted his brother while the two were eating and Robert had to be physically restrained from using his sword by Goscelin.<sup>45</sup> It is possible that Robert never forgave his brother for this ill treatment and this may be one of the most important reasons why he decided that he rather than his nephew, Abelard, should succeed Humphrey. It is the succession of Humphrey by his brother rather than his son and the subsequent rebellions of Abelard that followed that may illustrate why Roger Borsa commissioned the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*.

William of Apulia's poem provides us with no information as to how William Iron Arm was succeeded by three of his brothers in turn as Count of Apulia. The succession of one brother after another is never detailed, nor is its legitimacy expounded. What the *Gesta* creates as a result is an illusion of an unbroken family line whose rightful role in Apulia is to govern. This picture is important for the understanding of some of the reasons behind the commissioning of the poem because it is a distorted reflection of the realities of the political situation in southern Italy; Robert Guiscard was not the only possible successor to Humphrey nor was the ascendancy of the Hautevilles over the other immigrant families set in stone.

The *Gesta* refers briefly to Abelard rebelling against Robert Guiscard prior to the siege of Bari along with Geoffrey of Conversano and Goscelin.<sup>46</sup> William also describes a later revolt which involved Abelard, Count Peter II of Trani, Amicus II Count of

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<sup>45</sup>Goscelin never supported Robert's authority and eventually sided with the Byzantine Empire against him. Until his eventual capture and imprisonment Goscelin also gave support to Humphrey's son, Abelard. It is interesting that Goscelin should have supported Humphrey but not his younger brother. We might consider the possibility that Goscelin supported Abelard because he had no hope of peace under Robert after his actions at this one meal.

<sup>46</sup>WA, II, lines 444 - 479, pages 156 - 158.

Molfetta, Count Robert of Montescaglioso and Count Henry of Monte Sant'Angelo and was supported by Jordan I of Capua.<sup>47</sup> There were two important driving forces behind these rebellions, both of which posed severe threats to Robert Guiscard's authority but only one of which troubled his sons, Roger Borsa and Boamund.

Robert Guiscard's succession of his brother Humphrey disinherited Abelard. This is commented upon by William in connection with both of Abelard's revolts against Robert's authority. In the first instance Abelard was described as

demanding back his father's duties<sup>48</sup>

and subsequently as

mindful of the loss of his lands<sup>49</sup>

Abelard and his companions were defeated by Robert's forces and the unfortunate nephew was forced to flee. William's final recollection of the young rebel is telling as it gives a hint of his own views on the subject of succession:

Thus Abelard, because he had not taken the peace of the Duke, abandoned the rightful lands of his father and banished went to the lands of the Greeks at that time when the guardian of the empire was Alexius. The latter, a gentle man, received him courteously; treating him honourably and giving him many gifts. But jealous death, which cares to

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<sup>47</sup>WA, III, lines 509 - 687, pages 192 - 202.

<sup>48</sup>'*sibi iura paterna reposcens.*' WA, II, line 452, page 156.

<sup>49</sup>'*Amissaeque nepos terrae memor Abagelardus.*' WA, III, line 517, page 192.

spare no-one, entered his young limbs and he who had believed that he would return to power with the hostile race, with the symbols of justice and in triumph, exiled lived and died amongst the Greeks.<sup>50</sup>

William seems to be clearly stating here that Abelard was the rightful heir to Humphrey, not Robert Guiscard. It may appear strange that the *Gesta* is actually conceding that Robert had taken Abelard's place, but there are two reasons why William could afford to do this. Firstly the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* concentrates on the continuity of Hauteville power on the peninsula, thus while Abelard was usurped it was still by a member of the same ruling family (and William uses two other very potent methods of legitimising Robert's personal authority). Secondly, William could afford to be magnanimous to Abelard because he was dead and could therefore no longer pose a threat to the current Hautevilles. Furthermore, because Abelard was dead, the *Gesta* could stress that sons should succeed fathers as a means of supporting the authority of Boamund and Roger Borsa against their challengers.

The second of the driving forces behind the challenges to Robert Guiscard's power (and the motivation of Abelard's allies mentioned above) was the problem that his sons inherited and against which William's depiction of Hauteville authority and legitimacy was carefully formed. The *Gesta* recorded that originally the northern settlers had elected twelve Counts (of which the Hautevilles were but one) and

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<sup>50</sup> 'Sic quia pace ducis non fungitur Abagelardus,  
Et patrii iuris loca deserit, et Danaorum  
Exul adit terras, cum rector Alexius esset  
Imperii: clemens hunc suscipit ille benigne,  
Tractat honorifice, dat multa. Sed invida, nulli  
Parcere quae curat, iuveniles mors subit artus;  
Quique regressurum se credidit esse potentem  
Diversi generis cum fascibus atque triumphis  
Exul apud Danaos et mortuus est et humatus.' WA, III, lines 659 - 667, page 200.

These men planned to distribute all the lands from every quarter to themselves unless unfriendly Fors opposed. They proposed lands to each, deciding by lot to which leader they should belong and to whom tribute of the lands should be due.<sup>51</sup>

These origins were, as Graham Loud has observed, the root of Robert Guiscard's problems since he was

essentially building a new public authority in a land where political fragmentation had produced a power vacuum. He was always faced with revolt in Apulia from Normans unable to forget that in the original settlement of the area his elder brother, William the Iron Arm, had been but one of twelve elected counts.<sup>52</sup>

Although Robert Guiscard had managed to establish his authority over his fellow Counts, it was a position maintained with difficulty throughout his rule and this was part of the inheritance that he passed on to his two sons.<sup>53</sup> This was the challenge that the *Gesta* faced, to establish the legitimacy of the authority of Robert's authority in order to strengthen that of his heirs.

William of Apulia tackled this problem in three different ways. The first, as we have seen, was to stress the strengths and characteristics of the family (both past and

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<sup>51</sup> '...*Hi totas undique terras*

*Divisere sibi nisi fors inimica repugnet.*

*Singula proponunt loca, quae contingere sorte*

*Cuique duci debent, et quaeque tributa locorum.*' WA, I, lines 236 - 239, pages 110 - 112.

<sup>52</sup>G.A. Loud, *Church and Society in the Norman Principality of Capua 1058 - 1197* (Oxford, 1985), page 40.

<sup>53</sup>It is not the purpose of this chapter however to discuss in detail all the different revolts against Robert and his heirs. The clearest outline of these can be found in Graham Loud, *The Age of Robert Guiscard* (Harlow, 2000), pages 234 - 291.

present) as a whole. Secondly the *Gesta* stressed the importance of Robert's marriage to Sichelgaita and implied that his connection to the Lombard family raised his authority:

With a marriage of such great nobility the renowned name of Robert began to be advanced and the people who formerly had been accustomed to serve him by compulsion were presently released from their allegiance to the obligations of their ancestor's laws. For the Lombard people knew that Italy had been subject to his wife's great-grandfathers and grandfathers.<sup>54</sup>

Thirdly, and most importantly, the Hauteville ascendancy (and Robert's usurpation of his nephew's lands) were given the ultimate seal of approval, that of the Papacy.

Immediately following the sick Humphrey's commendation of his young son's inheritance into Robert's temporary care, and the death, eulogy and funeral of the Apulian Count, the *Gesta* describes Nicholas II's Council at Melfi. In many respects this is the most important event in the entire poem for it is here that William establishes why Robert and his heirs should hold power in southern Italy:

With the synod having finished, by the suit of many the Pope Nicholas conferred onto Robert the Ducal honour. This man alone of the counts had been confirmed by law, having been made duke by swearing the allegiance which is binding of a faithful man to the Pope. Whence

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<sup>54</sup> *'Coniugio ducto tam magnae nobilitatis,  
Augeri coepit Roberti nobile nomen,  
Et gens, quae quondam servire coacta solebat,  
Obsequio solvit iam debita iuris aviti.  
Nam proavis et avis subiectam coniugis huius  
Noverat Italiam gens Longobarda fuisse.'* WA, II, lines 436 - 441, page 156. This marriage is discussed in a different context in Chapter IV.

Calabria and all the region Apulia was granted to him, and dominion in Latium of the people of that land.<sup>55</sup>

The *Gesta* clearly states that Robert alone of all the counts was raised to this higher level of authority by virtue of Papal authority. William is thus establishing the position of Robert and his successors over the other Counts and their descendants. The further significance of his description of the Council of Melfi of 1059 is that it serves as a reminder of Urban II's Council at Melfi of 1089 at which the present Pope had confirmed Roger Borsa and Boamund's authority in their lands.<sup>56</sup> The *Gesta* thus reminds its audience of the recent Papal confirmation of Roger Borsa's authority while simultaneously showing the historical precedent for the authority of the Hautevilles over the other Counts. It is no accident that the chain of events as they appear in the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* are Humphrey's eulogy as "that gentle father of the country (who) had guided that land peacefully" (*patriae pater ille benignus hanc placide rexit*), Robert's confirmation as Duke by Nicholas II followed immediately by his marriage of great nobility into the Royal House of Salerno and a brief commentary on the number and nature of Sichelgaita's progeny.

We know that Roger Borsa commissioned the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, but this was not a poem directed towards establishing his authority over his brother Boamund, but rather aimed at promoting the virtues of his family lineage and illustrating the precedent for Hauteville ascendancy over the descendants of the other eleven counts of southern

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<sup>55</sup> *'Finita sinodo, multorum papa rogatu  
Robertum donat Nicholaus honre ducali.  
Hic comitum solus concessio iure ducatus  
Est papae factus iurando iure fidelis.  
Unde sibi Calaber concessus et Appulus omnis  
Est locus, et Latio patriae dominatio gentis.'* WA, II, lines 400 - 405, page 154.

<sup>56</sup> This passage works in a similar fashion for the authority of Urban II as it does for Roger Borsa and is discussed again in Chapter IV.

Italy. Roger (and Boamund as well who had to contend with Count Geoffrey of Conversano as a vassal) had to establish the legitimacy of his overlordship. This could be done by force, and there is evidence of the three Hauteville magnates working together to subdue unrest on the peninsula such as during the rebellions following rumours of Roger Borsa's death in 1093, but it could also be done by propaganda, and this for Roger was the purpose of the *Gesta*: to strengthen his authority by demonstrating the legitimacy of the position of his father (and the Hauteville family) through deeds, familial connections to the Lombard princes of Salerno and Papal endorsement.

## Urban II

William wrote that Pope Urban II was keen for a speedy completion of his work,<sup>57</sup> but why would the Roman Pontiff be interested in patronising an account of the Norman rise to power, an elevation which was often not in the interests of the Papacy? The explanation of this, and the portrayal of the Normans in southern Italy as the loyal guardians and friends of the Church lies in the chronological setting of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*. The authority of Urban II's papacy was constantly threatened by the existence of the antipope Clement III who had the strong backing of the German Emperor Henry IV. Against such a powerful sponsor the unfortunate Gregory VII had been forced to rely on the support of the Normans in the south. At the time when we might expect the commissioning of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* to have taken place, Urban II also depended, for a large part, on his ability to call in the support of the Norman magnates in Southern Italy if required. Urban spent more time in southern Italy than any other eleventh century

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<sup>57</sup>WA, Preface, lines XI - XIII, page 98.



pope, thus it follows that he would have been keen to ensure a settled environment in the area, which on his part could only be achieved through his visible support and legitimisation of the status quo. There is evidence that Urban II took an active interest in supporting the authority of the Hauteville family in the South. In 1089, following the Council of Melfi, Urban II toured the lands of Boamund - ordaining the new archbishop at Bari and consecrating both the shrine of St. Nicholas and a church in Brindisi.<sup>58</sup> In November 1092 Urban II met with Boamund at Anglona from where he seems to have accompanied and stayed with him at Taranto.<sup>59</sup> In 1093, as has been mentioned above, Urban met with Roger Borsa and Boamund at Monte Cassino.<sup>60</sup> It is clear from this that Urban took pains to maintain close links with his Norman supporters in the south. It should not be surprising therefore to find him patronising a work which stressed the legitimacy of the Hautevilles.

By the time William wrote his account of the siege of Palermo the First Crusade was already in progress,<sup>61</sup> hence his stressing of the Normans as *Cultores Christi* and the Sicilians as “enemies of the name divine” (*divini nominis hostes*).<sup>62</sup> It is William’s account of Palermo’s fall that is the key to understanding another aspect of papal patronage of his work and a desire for its hasty completion. While it cannot be accurately determined how long William took to complete the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* one might guess that it would have been commissioned before the inception of the Crusade, but Urban himself would probably have been considering what would become the definitive action of his papacy at least from the time of the Council of Piacenza in March 1095<sup>63</sup> if not before. It has often

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<sup>58</sup>*Codice diplomatico Barese*, I (Bari, 1897 - 1914), pages 61 - 65.

<sup>59</sup>Joannes Dominicus Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Paris, 1900), XX, col. 685.

<sup>60</sup>Mansi, *Op. Cit.*, cols. 643-644, *Cod. dip. Bar.*, I, pages 65-67, and Crudo, *Op. Cit.*, page 188.

<sup>61</sup>WA, III, lines 100 - 105, pages 168 - 170.

<sup>62</sup>WA, III, line 199, page 174.

<sup>63</sup>The importance role of the Council of Piacenza in the calling of the First Crusade has been highlighted by Peter Charanis. P. Charanis, ‘Byzantium, the West and the origin of the First Crusade’,



been suggested that Urban consulted Raymond of Toulouse in 1095 about the possibility of an eastern expedition before the Council of Clermont. It may not be too far fetched to conjecture that his meeting with Roger Borsa and Boamund in August 1093 at Monte Cassino - a major Byzantine communication relay with the west - had similar intent. The two men, both with experience of fighting Seljuqs and negotiating Balkan territories, may have advised the Pope on the feasibility of such a campaign, and even offered to take part.

The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* illustrates how Robert Guiscard's Balkan campaign was hindered by unrest within Apulia and the threat to the papacy from the German Emperor Henry IV. The clear lesson that can be drawn from this is that in order for any southern Italian magnate to take part in a prolonged campaign in the east, there would have to be stability in Apulia and thus recognition of the authority of the Hautevilles. Furthermore, Urban II (like his predecessor Gregory VII) would have wanted stability in the region in order to ensure that there was no opportunity for Henry IV to stir up mischief.<sup>64</sup> It may be that Urban II originally intended the experienced Hautevilles of southern Italy (and in particular perhaps Boamund, whose actions before during and after the Crusade suggest a close union with Alexius I Comnenus) to lead and form the main body of the Crusade to the East.<sup>65</sup> It is possible that these plans were spoilt by Amalfi's rebellion and bid for independence against which all three of the senior Hauteville magnates moved. Alternatively another interpretation of the events surrounding Amalfi's rebellion could show how involved the Hautevilles were with the First Crusade. The swift mobilisation of

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in *Byzantion IX* (Brussels, 1949).

<sup>64</sup>As Robinson has observed, while the campaign against investiture was never Urban II's foremost concern, Henry IV was consistently trying to strengthen the authority of Clement II and it was to that end that he stirred up trouble in southern Italy between 1090 and 1097. In Robinson's opinion, Urban II regarded his struggle against Henry IV "as a defensive war against a schismatic emperor and his antipope." Robinson, I., *Henry IV of Germany 1056 - 1106* (Cambridge, 1999), page 279. This point of view is clearly expressed through William's account of the relationship between Gregory VII and Henry IV (see Chapters III & IV).

<sup>65</sup>My views on the evidence for a close working relationship between Alexius and Boamund are discussed briefly in Appendix A.

the forces of both Roger of Sicily, Roger Borsa and Boamund against Amalfi in July/August 1096 suggests that they were already prepared for action. While we might expect close co-operation between the three relatives (indeed they had worked together in a similar fashion in 1093) it is interesting that all three should mobilise together against one city. When Boamund left to join the First Crusade so many men went with him that the siege had to be abandoned. Perhaps all three Hautevilles joined together in the hope of bringing Amalfi to heel quickly because the movement of those men and Boamund on Crusade was already planned and they knew that once they left for the Levant the siege would have to be discontinued? It seems hard to believe that the men who accompanied Boamund had not already made prior dispositions as to the governance and safety of their possessions before departing on Crusade.<sup>66</sup> The use of Boamund's port of Bari for the ferrying of the northern Frankish army across to Dyrrakhion indicates that he clearly expected the Crusade. Furthermore, as John France has noted, Boamund's forces moved at a considerably slower pace in the Balkans than their northern counterparts, along a separate route from the other Crusaders without a large Byzantine military escort.<sup>67</sup> This would indicate that Boamund and his men were expected and trusted by the Byzantine Emperor. Here perhaps is a further reason for Urban to want the speedy completion of a work which stressed the authority of the Hautevilles (and Roger Borsa in particular) in southern Italy: to create a climate in which more men might be encouraged to go on Crusade and southern Italy's foremost military commander with experience of both Greeks and Seljuqs would be free to leave his own (not insignificant) lands to do so.

Urban would have been particularly keen for people (particularly nobles in southern Italy) to remember the earlier 'Crusade' in Sicily, and their association with it. In

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<sup>66</sup>The importance of settling disputes at home and arranging finances prior to going on Crusade is discussed in detail by Jonathan Riley Smith. J. Riley Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (London, 1993), pages 31 - 57.

<sup>67</sup>J. France, *Victory in the East: A military history of the First Crusade* (Cambridge, 1994), page 107.

this context we may also see William's portrayal of the Normans as dutiful sons of the Church - this was as much the history Urban wanted them to remember as the way they wished to think of themselves. Urban wanted the aristocracy of southern Italy to think of themselves as the defenders and servants of the Church, and how better to encourage them to go on Crusade than to remind them of the Sicilian campaign of their forefathers? In considering the historical accuracy of William's emphasis on the respect of the Normans for Leo IX and Robert Guiscard's regard for Nicholas II and love of Gregory VII, the *Gesta's* omissions of their differences (and Robert's excommunication) does not necessarily constitute history related at the expense of the Church.

## Identifying the author

It is natural that any examination of race and stereotypes within a chronicle centres around the nationality of the author; and it is perhaps indicative of William's skill as a writer that even for historians deliberately searching the work for the smallest of pointers, William's racial identity has thus far remained inconclusive. Arguments have been forwarded for both giving him a Norman/Frankish identity and calling him a Lombard. This chapter will give an outline of the arguments for both theories, but will show that a largely ignored French identification made in the seventeenth century reveals the true identity of the poet.

Ferdinand Chalandon suggested of William that "it seems he was not a Norman for, several times, he mocks the greed of the conquerors. Perhaps he came from Giovenazzo, of which, on several occasions, he speaks highly."<sup>68</sup> Chalandon felt that William's praise of Giovenazzo and his emphasis on their loyalty suggested that he may have had his origins there. While this is a perfectly valid proposal which I for one would not discount I cannot countenance his preceding statement that William's criticism of Norman avarice indicates that he was not of Norman parentage. Christian theology regarded greed as one of the seven deadly sins and thus we would expect a mediaeval author (particularly a cleric) writing for a religious as well as a lay patron, to criticise this

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<sup>68</sup>"Il semble qu'il n'était pas Normand car, plusieurs fois, il raille l'avarice des conquérants. Peut-être était-il originaire de Giovenazzo, dont, à diverses reprises, il fait l'éloge." F. Chalandon, *Histoire de la domination Normande en Italie et en Sicile*, Volume One (Paris, 1907), page XXXIX.

vice whatever his race or that of the protagonists may have been. In addition to the possibility of his fondness for Giovenazzo stemming from some family connection I would also interpret William's emphasis on the loyalty of its people as stemming from his desire to portray both the devotion that Robert engendered from his subjects and more importantly how vassals should support their lord. Furthermore, to identify William with Giovenazzo is impractical since it is not the only city singled out for praise in the *Gesta*. William also noted that

There was no city in Apulia which the opulence of Bari could not surpass.

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The *Gesta* stresses the loyalty of Bari to the Byzantine Empire, the courage and steadfastness of its citizens, and makes a particular point of recording the presence of a Baresi contingent in Robert Guiscard's campaign against Palermo. Of Aversa, William declared

This place is full of wealth - profitable and pleasant; the inhabitants are lacking neither crops, nor fruits, nor meadows or trees. No place in the world is more delightful.<sup>70</sup>

The *Gesta* did not merely confine its praise to Apulian cities however, for those of the Campania are also praised. In one passage William described the Lombard (and later ducal capital) Salerno in such wise:

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<sup>69</sup> *Appula nulla erat urbs, quam non opulentia Bari Vinceret.* WA, II, lines 480 - 481, page 158.

<sup>70</sup> *Hic opibus plenus locus utilis est et amoenus; Non sata, non fructus, non prata arbustaque desunt. Nullus in orbe locus iocundior.* WA, I, lines 171 - 173, page 108.

There is no city in Latium more alluring than this one; it is overflowing with the fruits of the earth, trees, wine and water. They are not lacking there in apples, nuts and beautiful palaces, and it is not without beautiful women and upright men. One part occupies the plain, the other the mountain, and whatever might be wished for is furnished by land or by sea.<sup>71</sup>

Salerno was also mentioned twice by William in connection with the Cathedral Robert built for St Matthew where Gregory VII was later interred. The *Gesta* recorded that

In this city, Matthew, he constructed a church of extraordinary beauty for you and built a magnificent palace for himself.<sup>72</sup>

and

The Pope was buried in the church of Sait Matthew and enobled the city with the great treasure of his body. This city, which the translation of the Apostle Matthew had already made famous, was further enhanced by the vicar's burial there; the Duke would have chosen it in preference to all the other cities if he had been allowed to live.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> 'Urbs Latii non est hac deliciosior urbe;  
Frugibus, arboribus vinoque redundat et unda;  
Non ibi poma, nuces, non pulchra palatia desunt,  
Non species muliebris abest probitasque virorum.  
Altera planiciem pars obtinet, altera montem,  
Et quodcumque velis terrave marive ministrat.' WA, III, lines 470 - 475, page 190.

<sup>72</sup> 'Hac, Mathaeae, tibi construxit in urbe decoris  
Aecclesiam miri; sibi nobilis aula paratur.' WA, IV, lines 71 - 72, page 208.

<sup>73</sup> 'Aecclesia sancti Mathaei papa sepultus  
Nobilitat tanti thesauro corporis urbem.  
Hanc, quia translatus Mathaeus apostolus alti

William's stress that it was first the translation of Saint Matthew and later the burial of the Pope which made this city distinguished suggests that he was neither connected in any way to the Lombard dynasty which Robert Guiscard married into and subsequently replaced at Salerno, nor a former resident of that city. The Church of Saint Matthew is most likely singled out for special mention for two reasons: firstly Robert built it and thus it is evidence of his piety, and secondly Gregory VII (one of the most important characters in the *Gesta*) was interred there. William's references to Salerno have greater significance perhaps to the patronage of the work rather than the identity of the poet. The *Gesta's* stress that Gregory's corpse was a treasure indicates strong support for the legitimacy of the reform papacy and Robert Guiscard's reputation is hardly ill served by the reminder that he built the church where Gregory was buried. The suggestion that Salerno would have become the Robert's capital had he lived, and the fact that he had built a palace there most likely comes from Roger Borsa's later choice of Salerno to be his own capital. William thus used these brief allusions to Salerno to bolster the reputations of both Robert Guiscard and Roger Borsa.

Salerno's neighbouring coastal city, Amalfi, also received lavish praise:

This city seems to be rich of wealth and population, none has greater opulence in silver, cloths and gold from innumerable places. Many sailors live in this city and they are skilled in uncovering the ways of the sea and the heavens. Various things are brought there from the royal city of Alexandria and from Antioch, for they sail many a sea. The Arabs,

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*Nominis esse facit, meritumque vicarius iste  
 Auget ibi positus, prae cunctis urbibus unam  
 Dux elegisset, sibi vivere si licuisset.* 'WA, V, lines 276 - 281, page 250.



Libyans, Sicilians and Africans are known to them: this people is the most well known throughout almost the whole world, bearing their merchandise and loving to bring back goods.<sup>74</sup>

Suggesting one city as William's home, as Chalandon did, is therefore difficult since his descriptions suggest that he saw beauty and wealth wherever he had travelled in southern Italy. These descriptions cannot establish an Italian identity for William either, for as a man of Norman/Frankish descent or origin he would also be inclined to boast of the richness of the territories that his subject had conquered and governed. Furthermore the generosity of William's descriptions seem to follow a particular pattern: they praise either the wealth, crops or people of the city, or consist of combinations of these attributes - none of the passages describe architectural features of the cities or contain anecdotes which might suggest a personal acquaintance. Indeed there is little within these short verses which could not be ascertained from either a map, general knowledge of the area, or a second hand account. It is entirely possible that William, despite his southern Italian cognomen, never saw a single one of the cities he so briefly describes. These might be praised in the *Gesta* to highlight the wealth and achievements of the poet's Hauteville patrons, alternatively these cities may have been singled out by William since they were the ones whose Lords the Hautevilles most needed to flatter and remind of their current blessings.

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<sup>74</sup> *Urbs haec dives opum, populoque referta videtur,  
Nulla magis locuples argento, vestibus, auro,  
Partibus innumeris. Hac plurimus urbe moratur  
Nauta, maris coelique vias aperire peritus.  
Huc et Alexandri diversa feruntur ab urbe,  
Regis et Antiochi; gens haec freta plurima transit;  
His Arabes, Libi, Siculi noscuntur et Afri:  
Haec gens est totum notissima paene per orbem  
Et mercanda ferens et amans mercata referre.* WA, III, lines 477 - 485, page 190.



The most recent discussion of William's work and identity has been that of Kenneth Wolf, who saw in the *Gesta* a sympathetic treatment of the Lombards which to him indicated that "William had Lombard blood in his veins."<sup>75</sup> Wolf's views were based upon his misreading of the *Gesta's* account of the battle of Civitate, believing that William did not blame the Italians for the defeat of Leo IX's army. He also felt that William's praise for the Lombards Arduin, Melo and Argyro was significant. As Chapters Three and Four of this thesis will show however, William was not especially complimentary towards the Lombards or Italians in general (particularly at Civitate) and other, sounder explanations than those put forward by Wolf are available for those occasions when he does seem to stress Lombard nobility.

One particular passage that in the past invoked controversy over William's identity was his explanation of the origins of the Normans:

Because the wind, which the tongue of their native soil calls 'north', brought these men to the northern shores of the region from which they departed to seek the Latin lands, and because among these men it is 'man', which is named 'homo' amongst us, they are called 'Normans', that is men of the North wind.<sup>76</sup>

This passage does not distinguish between the identity of the author and the Normans, but between the language of his audience and the language from which the Normans derived their name. As Rossi argued almost a century ago, this phrase did not divide

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<sup>75</sup>Wolf, page 127.

<sup>76</sup>"*Hos quando ventus, quem lingua soli genialis  
Nort vocat, advexit boreas regionis ad oras  
A qua digressi fines petiere latinos,  
Et man est apud hos, homo quod perhibetur apud nos,  
Normanni dicuntur, id est homines boreales.*" WA, I, lines 6 - 10, page 98.

Normans from Italians but the Scandinavian tongue from Romance languages.<sup>77</sup> Mathieu observed that the Norman poets Wace and Benoit used this etymology in French verse in the twelfth century, and that the Normans outside of Bayeux were not speaking anything other than French as early as the reign of William Long Arm (927 - 943).<sup>78</sup> William himself seemed to regard being Norman as a cultural rather than familial identity. R.H.C. Davis suggested that “perhaps the difficulty in his case is that he did not regard the Normans as a strictly racial group. In a famous passage he said that the Normans used to recruit all the brigands who sought refuge with them, teaching them their own language and customs so as to form them into one people.”<sup>79</sup> As Mathieu pointed out, that language was French, thus William’s ‘them’ and ‘us’ distinction cannot be used to argue against a Norman/Frankish identification. If that were the case we would have to assume that none of his intended audience were Norman/Franks or thought of themselves as Norman/Franks; a construct highly improbable in a work dedicated to the son of a Norman emigrant and a Cluniac Pope.

Mathieu herself felt certain that William’s impartiality suggested Norman descent,<sup>80</sup> her suggestion that only a Frenchman might be able to write an impartial history ironically echoing the manner of racial prejudices and stereotypes that is one of the central parts of this thesis. Delogu agreed with her, noting that “on the basis of his education and of the ideas of the text, it is thought of him that, notwithstanding his surname, his origins are Frankish or Norman.”<sup>81</sup> Since the ideas of the poem are the main subject of discussion in this thesis, this observation will be addressed in detail in Chapters Three and Four below.

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<sup>77</sup>A. Rossi, ‘*Della patria di Guglielmo detto Appulo*’, in *Studi Storici* (Bologna, 1906), pages 201 - 243.

<sup>78</sup>Mathieu, page 19.

<sup>79</sup>R.H.C. Davis, *The Normans and their Myth* (London, 1976), pages 88 - 89.

<sup>80</sup>“Son impartialité, sa neutralité est remarquable. Je penche cependant en définitive à le croire Normand.” Mathieu, page 22.

<sup>81</sup>“Sulla base della sua cultura e di spunti ricavati dal testo, si è pensato che, nonostante il soprannome, fosse di origine franca o normanna.” P. Delogu, *I Normanni in Italia: Cronache della conquista e del regno* (Naples, 1984), page 268.

William's lavish praise of Gregory VII and his inclusion of the 1059 Council of Melfi (an event echoed by Urban II's first Council held there in 1089) attest to views which strongly favoured the reform papacy, a predominantly Cluniac movement.

One of the most conclusive arguments for a Norman/Frank identification of William of Apulia is his name itself. The Christian name William is clearly a Norman/Frank one, which did not appear in southern Italy until after the Norman invasion. William, like Robert Guiscard's son Boamund, may have been entirely of Norman stock and yet born and raised in Apulia, or like Roger Borsa he may have had mixed racial parentage. If William was entirely of southern Italian parentage, then his Christian name indicates that his parents, seeing that the future of the region lay in Norman hands, named him in a northern fashion so as to give him a better start in life.<sup>82</sup> They may even have sent him to France or Normandy for the same purpose. If that were the case then despite his racial origins, by his own admission he would be a Norman or a Frank through his cultural identity. Further argument for the identification of William as a Norman/Frank can be found in Joanna Drell's recent study on ethnic identity in southern Italy, which draws a further distinction between Norman and Lombard traditions of identification.<sup>83</sup> Drell's study illustrates that Lombards of all social levels would identify themselves with regard to their parentage - for example, "Maius, son of John' or, at a much more exalted social level, 'Henry, son of Roger of San Severino'."<sup>84</sup> This pattern remained consistent well into the later twelfth century and showed that "despite intermarriage with the Normans, Lombard families preserved the memory of

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<sup>82</sup>A comparable example is cited by Robert Bartlett in his discussion of the changing of names as an indication of the settlement processes, of a young English boy named Tostig whose parents re-Christened him William "when his youthful companions mocked the name". Bartlett, *Op. Cit.*, pages 271 - 272.

<sup>83</sup>J. Drell, 'Cultural syncretism and ethnic identity: The Norman 'conquest' of Southern Italy and Sicily', in *Journal of Medieval History* Vol. 25, No. 3 (1999), pages 187 - 202.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, page 193.

their Lombard past... the deliberate marriage of the few Norman warriors with the indigenous Lombards did not extinguish the Lombard sense of genealogy.”<sup>85</sup> By contrast the Normans did not record genealogies more than one generation - a reflection perhaps of their lowly origins (or positions within their families) which resulted in their having to seek lands outside of Normandy. The generality of William’s cognomen, emphasising a place rather than family, in the light of Drell’s research suggests that it is more probable that he was of Norman rather than Lombard origin.

There is a further dimension to William’s name, for *Apuliensis* suggests a cognomen applied outside of Apulia to indicate a place of origin - it seems absurd that the poet would have been known in this way if he was still in Apulia. ‘William of Apulia’ is how the poet would have been known to his contemporaries outside Apulia, indeed outside of southern Italy, for otherwise he would most likely have been known by a familial cognomen or one relating to his original city of occupation/origin. The generality of this cognomen suggests that neither William nor his family had been in southern Italy long enough to become associated with one place. The oldest copy of the *Gesta* that survives does so in Normandy, but it seems hard to believe that the name given to the author on this copy would have been different to its master or indeed the original - what possible reason could there be for altering it? William would not have been recorded as *Apuliensis* if this was not the name that he had come to be known by at the time of the *Gesta*’s composition.<sup>86</sup> The logic is irrefutable - William may have had his origins in Apulia, but he did not compose the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* there.

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<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, page 195.

<sup>86</sup>It would seem unlikely that William would deliberately hide his true identity behind a false cognomen: firstly because his work is of such a high literary standard and secondly since he clearly names his patrons at the start of the work and asks one of them, Roger Borsa, for recognition of his endeavours at its end. The inscription of William of Apulia on the *Gesta* is the only evidence available of his authorship, he does not use his name within the work itself and his only references to himself are in the preface and epilogue to the poem where he uses an anonymous ‘me’.

Michele Fuiano, writing a year earlier than R.H.C. Davis, took a bold course in the debate over William's identity, washing his hands by declaring that "it is useless to reconstruct the information relative to his profession and his nationality."<sup>87</sup> This is not the case. By establishing through a logical approach to his cognomen that William of Apulia was no longer commonly resident in that region of Italy, we can make a precise identification of the poet.

Over two and a half centuries ago the *Histoire Littéraire de la France* identified William of Apulia with the *Willelmus Apulus* who in 1092 was at Bordeaux, arbitrating in litigation between Saint Aubin d'Angers and the Abbey of the Trinity of Vendome.<sup>88</sup> This identification was commented upon by Mathieu, who suggested in turn that the latter could have been the *Guillelmus Apulus* of Marmoutier who was concerned with litigation revolving around Saint Aubin d'Angers, this time with the Abbey of Saint Nicholas, in 1098.<sup>89</sup> However Mathieu, and subsequently Wolf, both discounted this identification with the author of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* on the grounds that this William was evidently in France at the time the *Gesta* was composed. But there is no evidence to suggest that the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* had to have been composed in Italy; William only used recorded sources for the opening parts of his work,<sup>90</sup> which could have been studied at any time after its commission - the later books all consist of information that anyone who had grown up in Apulia would have known, and the text itself never gives dates - only the odd seasonal reference - which may suggest the predominant use of oral tradition as a basis for the work,<sup>91</sup> and indeed William's cognomen suggests that the poem was penned

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<sup>87</sup>"È inutile rifare l'analisi dei dati relativi alla sua professione e alla sua nazionalità." M. Fuiano, *Studi di storiografia medioevale ed umanistica* (Naples, 1975), page 3.

<sup>88</sup>*Histoire Littéraire de la France* (Paris, 1747), pages 490 - 491.

<sup>89</sup>Mathieu, pages 24 - 25.

<sup>90</sup>Mathieu, page 27.

<sup>91</sup>The lack of dates may be an indicator of oral sources, but William's poetic genre also explains the absence of such information. Either way, oral sources do not necessary preclude the provision of dates.

outside Apulia. If the William at Bordeaux in 1092 was the author of the *Gesta*, there is evidence that his presence there did not preclude an ability to travel to southern Italy; as Mathieu notes, many of the monks who were supposed to be with *Willelmus Apulus* at Bordeaux in 1092, are also recorded as being with Urban II at S.Maria della Mattina in Calabria in the same year.<sup>92</sup> Mathieu disagreed with the observation of the *Histoire Littéraire de la France* that it was extraordinary to see two individuals at the same time with such a rare cognomen, noting that a *Willelmus Apulus* can be found in England in the first part of the twelfth century.<sup>93</sup> This argument is somewhat specious, partially because of the different geographical setting (although given the example of travelling cited above there is no reason to assume that Marmoutier monks might not have visited England, indeed Marmoutier monks were specifically sought after by William the Conqueror for his monastic foundations), but primarily because the chronology is close enough for him to be the same man.<sup>94</sup> Given the unusual and distinctive nature of William's cognomen, it would be extremely surprising to find two contemporary individuals at all, let alone in France, yet the argument for the common identification of these 'three' Williams should not rest on these laurels alone.

The *Willelmus Apulus* who assisted at Bordeaux in the litigation between Saint Aubin d'Angers and the Abbey of the Trinity of Vendome in 1092 was listed amongst the clergy of the second rank.<sup>95</sup> He clearly had some prominence in the proceedings, for although he has no title, his name is listed after Archdeacon Achelm of Bordeaux and prior to William, Archpriest of Saumur, and Peter the Dean of Bordeaux. It is not

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<sup>92</sup>Mathieu, page 25.

<sup>93</sup>Mathieu, footnote, page 24.

<sup>94</sup>The kings of England had strong links with Marmoutier. As mentioned below, William the Conqueror chose Marmoutier monks for his very first monastic foundation at Battle in England. Henry II patronised the writings of John of Marmoutier in the twelfth century.

<sup>95</sup>Bernard de Broussillon, *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Saint Aubin d'Angers*, II (Angers, 1903), pages 218 - 223.



possible to determine from this document where William was a cleric, which is why the subsequent case unearthed by Mathieu is so important. This case, between Saint Aubin d'Angers and the Abbey of St Nicholas in 1098, had a William of Apulia as a presiding judge.<sup>96</sup> It is logical to assume that the two are the same man for a number of reasons. Firstly the proximity in chronology and geography renders the common existence of two men with the same cognomen unlikely. Secondly the commonality of Saint Aubin D'Angers: if William had impressed in his role in 1092 is it not likely that he would have been asked to assist in a later dispute? Thirdly William's role in 1098 is one of higher stature, a logical progression for an able man. These two events in themselves would suggest that William was connected with St Aubin d'Angers, but the second case identifies William as a monk of Marmoutier. This points to William as an arbitrator provided by the mother house, which may explain to a degree his prominence in the list of names for the first case despite having no obvious rank.<sup>97</sup> It is improbable that two different Williams of Apulia would have assisted the same priory within such a short space of time, thus the identification of these two men is sound. However, the feasibility of identifying the William of Apulia who wrote the *Gesta* with this contemporary Marmoutier monk of the same name rests upon an assessment of the type of monasticism practised at Marmoutier, its reputation and status at the time and what links it may have had to both Urban II and the northern European families of southern Italy.

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<sup>96</sup>Bernard de Broussillon, *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Saint Aubin d'Angers*, I, *Cartulaire de XII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Angers, 1903), CVIII, page 127.

<sup>97</sup>St Aubin d'Angers, the Trinity of Vendome and the abbey of St Nicholas were priories of Marmoutier, hence as a monk and representative of the mother house on official business we might expect William to have been accorded some respect.

## Marmoutier, Urban II and Southern Italy

Marmoutier was a Benedictine monastery. The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* was composed on the eve of the foundation of the Cistercian Order, but despite the splinters yet to come the Benedictine Order itself was enjoying an unprecedented degree of expansion and consolidation.<sup>98</sup> It is tempting to view the appearance of new orders such as the Cistercians and Carthusians in the subsequent century as evidence of Benedictine decline, but this is not the case and Berlière's study of the size of Benedictine houses throughout this period shows that Benedictine monasticism was still on the increase in the twelfth century.<sup>99</sup> In particular the half century leading up to the *Gesta's* composition had seen the foundation of a number of Benedictine houses in southern Italy under the direction of William of Apulia's subject, Robert Guiscard, and his brother Roger of Sicily.

<sup>100</sup> Many of the monks at these abbeys, such as Robert de Grandmesnil and his fellow brothers from St Evroul, came from houses in Normandy and France - evidence that the rulers of southern Italy valued the education and standards of the trans Alpine Benedictine houses. Their presence was not merely a background spiritual comfort to the locality but also a highly visual and symbolic one: the Benedictine Order was in the process of constructing some of the finest architecture of the middle ages in what Van Engen described as "the quite literal rebuilding of Europe."<sup>101</sup> The long arm of the Benedictine Order stretched to the highest levels of the Church: William of Apulia's patron, Urban II, had been a Benedictine monk as had his two predecessors, Victor III and Gregory VII.

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<sup>98</sup>Indeed most of the offshoots from the Benedictine Order existed because of an internal backlash against its material success and growth.

<sup>99</sup>U. Berlière, 'Le nombre des moines dans les anciens monastères', *Revue Bénédictine* Vol. 41 (1929), pages 231 - 261.

<sup>100</sup>L.-R. Ménager, 'Les fondations monastiques de Robert Guiscard', *Quellen und Forschungen XXXIX* (1959), pages 86 - 93; G.A. Loud, *The Age of Robert Guiscard* (Harlow, 2000), pages 268 - 278.

<sup>101</sup>J. Van Engen, 'The "Crisis of Cenobitism" reconsidered: Benedictine Monasticism in the years 1050 - 1150', *Speculum* 61 (Cambridge Massachusetts, 1986), page 280.



The Benedictine Order thus enjoyed a position of prominence at the time of the *Gesta's* composition, but of far more importance for any identification of William of Apulia with a Marmoutier monk is the reputation its members enjoyed for scholarly achievements. This applies on two different levels; firstly the Benedictines (and in particular those of Marmoutier Abbey) would have to have a reputation for good scholarship and in particular history writing in order for one of their number to be chosen to compose the *Gesta* (although Urban II's origins as a French Benedictine monk strongly suggest where he would be looking for capable authors) and secondly the reputation would have to be such to recruit talented monks who might be able to write history. Van Engen has observed that it is possible to draw up a list of Benedictine authors active in the years 1050 - 1150 which goes some way to illustrate the quality of their education: Lanfranc and Anselm of Bec, Guibert of Nogent, Peter Abelard, Rupert of Deutz, Theophilus Presbyter, Suger of St Denis, Orderic Vitalis and William of Malmesbury.<sup>102</sup> These authors demonstrate the high levels of education found in Benedictine foundations of the age and the quality of penmanship in autobiography, history, law, literature and theology that Black Monks could produce. Why William of Apulia might be found in a Benedictine house in France rather than southern Italy may in part be answered by the quality of scholarship evinced in this list: a level of education and opportunity which would be a natural draw for a talented monk.

The movement of men from Italy to Normandy and France to further their monastic careers is a well documented phenomenon in the eleventh century. Perhaps one of the more famous examples, mentioned in Van Engen's list above, is Lanfranc, who went on to a distinguished career as Abbot of Caen and subsequently Archbishop of

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<sup>102</sup>J. Van Engen, *op. cit.*, page 281.

Canterbury. A contemporary and successor of his (at Bec, his first monastery and later Canterbury) was the equally distinguished Anselm, who hailed from northern Italy. Robert of Torigni attributes to Lanfranc the growth of Bec as a centre of learning in the west, and indeed portrays Lanfranc as a magnet who drew monks and donations to the monastery, resulting in its need for expansion.<sup>103</sup> The significance of this is twofold. Firstly on matters of education it illustrates that it was possible to gain a very high standard of education in both Greek and Latin in Italy, since Lanfranc already had these when he came to Bec; it furthermore suggests that such an education was keenly received in Normandy since Robert speaks of eminent Latin masters, clerks and nobles flocking to meet with him; it follows therefore both that the standard of education in Normandy and France was fair and that it was probably enhanced thereafter. Secondly Robert's interpolation illustrates the strong connection which Bec must have felt to Italy, whose emigrants had brought both education, wealth and expansion to the monastery; this sentiment may explain why Bec acquired a copy of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*.

Benedictine monasticism in France could thus prove a draw for talented individuals from abroad and certainly had the levels of education necessary to provide a platform for William of Apuila, but in addition to this Black Monks of the age were known by both religious and lay patrons for their ability to compose accounts of recent political events. The ability of 'ordinary' Benedictine monks to compose history for a set purpose is amply demonstrated by a series of late eleventh and early twelfth century documents written by the monks of Marmoutier's neighbouring Abbey of Noyers. Stephen White's study of feuding and peacemaking in the Touraine illustrates how these monks were heavily involved in their local community as mediators between different feuding families and that their accounts of the settling of such disputes indicate great

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<sup>103</sup>RT, IX, page 66.

talent in storytelling. What is clear from their texts is that these monks had the ability to write structured narratives and recreate "a minor literary genre requiring them to fashion stories of a given shape out of carefully selected materials."<sup>104</sup> Of course these monks were not merely passive writers, they were actively involved in the mediations they described and recorded and had experience of the violence and complexities of the world outside the cloister, experience which no doubt added to the quality of their writing. As we have already seen, Marmoutier's William of Apulia was also a mediator of disputes and while we have no surviving record of them, it is not implausible that in his capacity as one of the adjudicating figures present in those that we do know of, he would have written accounts for the record. The Benedictine monks of Marmoutier itself did not trail behind neighbouring Noyers in literary accomplishments. Towards the end of the tenth century one of their number had composed a history of the abbey, carefully projecting an image of continuity and autonomy. After this point there is a gap in the record of history writing at Marmoutier, until 1095, when a new history of the monastery was presented to either Urban II or one of his legates.<sup>105</sup> The purpose of this history was to establish the legitimacy of Marmoutier's claims to independence from the Archbishopric of Tours - a claim that was acknowledged by Urban II at the Council of Clermont. Unfortunately this work is anonymous, but its author demonstrates a skill in the selection and manipulation of his subject matter to eloquently argue a (largely specious) version of events that would be extremely familiar to readers of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*.

The Benedictine monasteries of France certainly had a reputation which would draw men from Italy to them, as indicated by the examples of Lanfranc, Anselm and William of Apulia (whether this William was the author of the *Gesta* or not). In this

<sup>104</sup>S.D. White, 'Feuding and Peacemaking in the Touraine around the year 1100', *Studies in Ancient and Mediaeval history, thought and religion* (New York, 1986), page 205.

<sup>105</sup>This chronicle has been dated to 1095 by Sharon Farmer. S. Farmer, *Communities of Saint Martin - Legend and Ritual in Medieval Tours* (London, 1991), page 157.

period the standards of education amongst the Benedictine monks should certainly make one of them the first choice of historians for an identification of a work of such high quality as the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*. It should not be forgotten that William of Apulia's contemporary southern Italian chroniclers, Amatus, Leo of Ostia and Malaterra were all Benedictine monks - indicating that they were the prime choice of Hauteville patrons of the day. Most significant of all is that the Benedictine monks of Marmoutier Abbey in particular produced a legitimising historical tract just prior to the calling of the First Crusade (at the time when we may have expected the *Gesta* to have been commissioned) and presented it to William of Apulia's patron, Urban II.

The William of Apulia whom we know resided at Marmoutier in the last decade of the eleventh century was probably influenced in his decision to become a monk there by the scale of the reputation of this Abbey. Marmoutier's renown in the 1060's is amply illustrated by William the Conqueror's decision to staff the monastic settlement he founded at Battle with the monks of this abbey.<sup>106</sup> William's patronage allowed its particular brand of monasticism to spread within both Normandy and England. Indeed Marmoutier's centralising authority over its many priories and unique links with the Dukes of Normandy, Kings of England and Counts of Anjou may have played a role in assisting the formation of another unique political entity: Lemarignier has suggested that "Marmoutier paved the way for the Plantagenet Empire."<sup>107</sup> Only the fellow Benedictine institution of Cluny enjoyed an international reputation and independence equal to or superseding that of Marmoutier: by 1100 the abbey was responsible for 114 priories and deaneries on the continent.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>OV, XXXVII, page 173.

<sup>107</sup>J.-F. Lemarignier, 'Political and monastic structures in France at the end of the tenth and the beginning of the eleventh century', in Ed., F.L. Cheyette, *Lordship and Community in Medieval Europe* (New York, 1968), pages 119 - 120.

<sup>108</sup>Farmer, *op.cit.*, page 123.

Marmoutier's wealth and influence had been built up through a combination of immunity from outside taxation and control since 909, and the generous patronage of the Counts of Blois and Anjou. This, combined with its connections to the cult of St Martin and its reputation as a model Benedictine institution, ensured its prosperity and growth through the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries.<sup>109</sup> This development had not been easy and the abbey had faced strong opposition on occasion from its traditional rival as leader of the community of St Martin, the Archbishop of Tours, and at times from its generous patrons the Counts of Anjou. The Counts of Anjou were happy to found and patronise new abbeys, but were less happy when Marmoutier increased its control over appointments within its daughter houses as part of its drive to reform its own administration. In 1064 Geoffrey the Bearded of Anjou expressed his dissatisfaction with the resistance of the monks to his attempt to invest the abbot with the pastoral staff by attacking Marmoutier's possessions.<sup>110</sup> The Counts of Anjou's attempts to assert their authority over the monastic institution whose growth they had caused through their patronage were undermined in the later half of the eleventh century by the increasing authority of the Papacy, the King of France and the Duke of Normandy, to whom the monks were not shy to turn for support.<sup>111</sup> The new political situation was acknowledged by Geoffrey's successor Fulk Rechin with a promise to recognise some of Marmoutier's privileges in 1073 and a donation of land to the abbey in 1085, indicating his desire to heal old wounds.<sup>112</sup> By 1096 Urban II had enough confidence in the good relations between the two to place Marmoutier under Fulk Rechin's protection.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup>S. Farmer, *Communities of Saint Martin - Legend and Ritual in Medieval Tours* (London, 1991), pages 66 - 77.

<sup>110</sup>L. Halphen, *Le comté d'Anjou au XIe siècle* (Paris, 1906), pages 139 - 140.

<sup>111</sup>B.H. Rosenwein, T. Head & S. Farmer, 'Monks and their enemies: a comparative approach', in *Speculum* 66 (1991), page 793.

<sup>112</sup>*Ibid.*, pages 793, 787- 788.

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*, page 788.

The support of Urban II was vital for Marmoutier's struggle for independence from the authority of the Archbishop of Tours. In 1089 Urban sided with the monks against the Archbishop with a bull of exemption, specifying that newly elected abbots did not have to give oaths of subjection to the archbishop, nor could he make visitations to the abbey.<sup>114</sup> In 1095, following the presentation of a new history of the abbey, Urban confirmed the issue in Marmoutier's favour at the Council of Clermont, which the abbot of Marmoutier attended. The position of Marmoutier's William of Apulia as representative of the abbey in cases of religious litigation suggests that he would be a likely candidate to accompany his abbot to the Council of Clermont. Furthermore as a monk who clearly had experience in officiating over disputes between different religious houses we should expect him to have played a role in the formation of Marmoutier's new history even if he himself was not the actual author. This history may have relevance to the question of the *Gesta's* authorship. Sharon Farmer noted how the eleventh-century history of Marmoutier skilfully merged genres of writing and

resembled noble genealogies in its use of the Viking era, yet it had more affinity with the *gesta episcoporum/abbatum*. A continuous transmission of grace apparently held together the chain of Marmoutier's abbots... Furthermore it was God, by implication, who caused the second half of Marmoutier's history to recreate the first half of the abbey's history in a typological manner.<sup>115</sup>

This would seem to be a link between the anonymous history of Marmoutier and the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*. As I shall discuss in the following chapter, William chose more

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<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup>Farmer, *op. cit.*, page 165.



often to imply divine guidance and will rather than interrupt his story with religious platitudes. The author of this history seems to have done the same. These may be the results of the style of writing at Marmoutier or they may even be parallels between two different works composed by the same author.<sup>116</sup> Certainly, depending on when the *Gesta* was commissioned, the anonymous history would either have been composed just prior or at the same time. If the *Gesta* had been commissioned as early as 1093, William's involvement in this other project would explain the delay in its composition, causing "the request of the reverend Father Urban" to forbid him to be sluggish. Did Urban press upon William to make haste at Clermont in 1095? Or was the *Gesta* only commissioned in 1095 following Urban's admiration of how Marmoutier had produced an author who could so manipulatively turn history to political ends?

Urban II's links to Marmoutier are well documented, providing plenty of opportunity for him to have had a passing acquaintance with some of its more able scholars. In 1091 a Marmoutier monk, Ranger, was appointed Archbishop of Reggio in Calabria. by Urban.<sup>117</sup> Ranger's appointment raises a number of questions. Was this monk known personally to the Pope? If this was the case how many other senior Marmoutier monks did Urban know? Did Urban II merely ask the abbot to recommend one of his flock for the post? Was the appointment of a Marmoutier monk due to connections between that abbey and Roger of Sicily?<sup>118</sup> There are no surviving statistics

<sup>116</sup>The fact that the history of Marmoutier is, unlike the *Gesta*, anonymous, is not a bar to this argument. The Marmoutier history was composed for the benefit of the monastic community - the author himself would only benefit through rewards or promotions bestowed by the Abbot, who would know his identity. Thus there was no reason for the work to be attributed to an author. The *Gesta*, on the other hand, was composed for an audience outside the monastery independent of the Abbot. William may therefore have been hoping for an ecclesiastical appointment outside the monastery from either Urban or Roger in reward for his services, hence his identification with his work.

<sup>117</sup>C.F. H. Von Klewitz, 'Studien ueber die Wiederherstellung der Römischen Kirche in Süditalien durch das Reformpapsttum', *Quellen und Forschungen*, XXV (1933-1934), page 122, in Mathieu, page 25.

<sup>118</sup>Of which more below. The first choice for the post had apparently been Urban II's former teacher Bruno of Rheims (home to another of Marmoutier's daughter houses) who had taken up an eremitic existence in Calabria. Loud, *The Age of Robert Guiscard* (Harlow, 2000), page 269.

for the number of monks at Marmoutier, but even given the fact that it was, like Cluny, a substantial abbey, Ranger would certainly have known its William of Apulia.<sup>119</sup> The installation of a Marmoutier monk who knew a William of Apulia as archbishop in a southern Italian see in lands controlled by Roger of Sicily by Urban II in 1091 is an event that might be considered to have significance for anyone interested in the authorship of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*.

In 1092 Urban met a delegation of Marmoutier monks at S. Maria della Matina, in Calabria.<sup>120</sup> Curiously some of the monks listed as being present on this occasion were among the individuals meant to be with William of Apulia at Bordeaux that year for the litigation between Saint Aubin d'Angers and the Abbey of the Trinity of Vendome. Here we have an occasion where monks who definitely knew William of Apulia at Marmoutier met with Urban II, the patron of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*. In 1095 a large delegation from Marmoutier was present at the Council of Clermont. The following year Urban visited Marmoutier's daughter house at Saint Nicholas d'Angers on the 14th February and on the 10th March was at Marmoutier itself, where a William of Apulia resided, to confirm its privileges and dedicate the abbey church.<sup>121</sup> If the William of Apulia of Marmoutier and the *Gesta* are to be identified perhaps this was the occasion upon which Urban urged William to make haste?

While the careers and examples set by Lanfranc and Anselm illustrate that it is perfectly probable that a young man of Norman descent might seek a monastic career in

<sup>119</sup>U. Berlière, *op. cit.*, pages 246 - 247. Sharon Farmer suggested that the numbers may have been a little more than 140. Farmer, *op. cit.*, N.18, page 123. Even if the numbers were double this it is hard to believe that all the monks of the community would not have known each other. Furthermore we should consider the fact that Ranger's appointment suggests seniority (and thus a number of years) within the community as does William of Apulia's role as a representative of the mother house in 1092 and 1098, thus rendering it even more likely that the two would be acquainted.

<sup>120</sup>Bernard de Broussillon, *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Saint Aubin d'Angers I* (Angers, 1903), No. DCXXXVIII.

<sup>121</sup>Louis Halphen, *Le comté d'Anjou au XIe siècle* (Paris, 1906), pages 324 - 325.



France or Normandy rather than remain in Italy, links between Marmoutier and southern Italian families have yet to be established. Louis Ménager's exhaustive study of the Norman and Frankish emigrants in southern Italy and Sicily in the eleventh to twelfth centuries does, however, provide us with some possible links. Reading through his inventory of names, it is possible to find a number of families originating from settlements where there were priories of Marmoutier: Bellême, Mortain, Perrières, Blois and Le Mans.<sup>122</sup> Young men from such families seeking a career in an increasingly francophile Church would be more likely to gravitate to Marmoutier. Ménager's inventory merely covers all the available records, we cannot know how many poorer and unrecorded emigrants may have hailed from lands where Marmoutier held sway.<sup>123</sup> The discussion of Marmoutier above indicates that that the abbey had a size and reputation to attract an Apulian Norman. Ménager's study provides a bridgehead from which we can begin to establish whether we know of any aristocratic families in southern Italy with direct ties to the abbey by which its reputation may might have attracted an Apulian Norman?

Chronologically the first link we can draw between southern Italian families and Marmoutier is at the abbey's daughter house of Mortain. The Count of Mortain, William Warlenc, was exiled by his cousin Duke William of Normandy c1055.<sup>124</sup> William left for Apulia, where he successfully integrated himself with the status quo.<sup>125</sup> Before turning to William's Italian fortunes it is worth considering the relationship he would have had with Marmoutier. As Count of Mortain William would be expected to fulfil the role of the

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<sup>122</sup>L-R. Ménager, *Hommes et institutions de l'Italie normande* (London, 1981), pages 298, 330, 339, 369 and 380.

<sup>123</sup>I am making the assumption (based on his Christian name) that William was the son of immigrants, however it is equally possible that he may have been Italian. If that were the case his emigration north to Marmoutier would fit the francophile pattern set by his use of a northern Christian name.

<sup>124</sup>OV, Lib.VII, XIX, pages 126 - 129.

<sup>125</sup>Of which more below.

immediate protector of the daughter house of Mortain. As part of the normal expressions of piety it is likely that he and his family were patrons of the monastery and would therefore have connections with its abbot. Furthermore, since Marmoutier insisted that it invested the abbots of daughter houses and was increasingly concerned with centralising its bureaucracy in this period, it is likely that as Count he would have had some direct contact with the mother house itself. Thus here we have an example of a senior Norman nobleman, who would associate monasticism with personal experience of Marmoutier monks, settling in southern Italy. It is possible to furthermore to link William Warlenc to the Hautevilles. William settled in Apulia and Robert of Sicily's second wife was Eremberga, William of Warlenc's daughter.

In his interpolation of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* Orderic Vitalis mentioned William Giroie, who became a monk at Le Bec after he was cruelly seized, mutilated and blinded.<sup>126</sup> Significantly William's brother was a monk of Marmoutier, and was also mentioned by Orderic:

Ralph the Clerk - so called because he was very learned, and also called Ill-Tonsured, because he took part in military action and thus ill preserved his clerical dignity.<sup>127</sup>

This brief reference provides us not only with the information that Marmoutier was deemed as a suitable place for a clerical career for a nobleman, but also that it was linked with a cleric who had a reputation for his education. Thus Marmoutier would most likely have had the necessary texts available to provide the education or resources necessary to write the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* (although it is equally possible that William may have

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<sup>126</sup>OV, Lib.VII, X, page 108.

<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.* Ralph died in 1062.

received his education in Italy and been drawn to Marmoutier as a major monastic settlement). Ralph the Ill-Tonsured's decision to become a monk at Marmoutier rather than its daughter house of Bellême (with which his family was linked through their lord, William Talvas), was probably linked to the importance of this monastery in eleventh century France. Bellême itself was the home of many of the immigrants to southern Italy. In 1077 Mabel of Bellême, wife of Roger of Montgomery and scourge of the Giroie family, finally succeeded in pushing her rivals to murder. Her death forced her enemies to flee to Apulia.<sup>128</sup> Here is another example of men with familiarity of Marmoutier's power and prestige settling in southern Italy.

Another possible route by which Ralph and Marmoutier's fame may have spread to Apulia was through the line of Ralph's brother William Giroie. William's son, William of Montreuil, emigrated to southern Italy c1050 and his father had further connections to the south through his nephews Hugh and Robert of Grandmesnil. In 1062 William Giroie himself travelled to Apulia on monastic business to collect money accumulated by his son and died at Gaeta, shortly after beginning the journey home.<sup>129</sup> William of Montreuil hardly played an insignificant role in southern Italian affairs, becoming son in law and Lieutenant to Richard of Capua.

The Grandmesnil family had familial ties to William Giroie and his renowned Marmoutier brother Ralph the Clerk/Ill-Tonsured. Both Hugh and Robert also had strong connections to the Hauteville family. Hugh de Grandmesnil's son, William, married Robert Guiscard's daughter Mabilia and thus became brother in law to William of Apulia's nominated patron, Roger Borsa. Robert de Grandmesnil had been Abbot of St Evroul, but was exiled and fled to southern Italy in 1061. Robert was given shelter by

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<sup>128</sup>G.A. Loud, *The Age of Robert Guiscard* (Harlow, 2000), page 89.

<sup>129</sup>OV, XXIII, page 142.

Roger of Sicily, who founded the community of St Euphemia to provide a home for the former Abbot and his fellow refugees.<sup>130</sup> Roger may have had other than pious motivations for his consideration to the exiled Robert, whose sister, Judith, soon afterwards became the Hauteville magnate's first wife.

### Conclusion

William's cognomen suggests very strongly that he wrote outside southern Italy and if we were to look for monastic settlements with strong enough a reputation to draw men away from Italy, Cluny (from which came Urban II and possibly Gregory VII) and Marmoutier would be the first candidates. The fact that the two other chroniclers chosen by the Hautevilles to write histories, Amatus and Malaterra, were both Benedictine monks renders it probable that William of Apulia would have been one as well. Many of the immigrants to southern Italy came from lands connected to Marmoutier and their history strengthens the case for this monastery being chosen by an aspiring cleric. We know Marmoutier did draw men from southern Italy as there are records of a William of Apulia being a member of the community there. The existence of a monk at Marmoutier called William of Apulia at the same time as the composition of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* provides a more than viable alternative to the traditional 'anonymous' author. In the absence of any strong evidence to the contrary we should assume that William of Apulia who wrote the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* was the same man as the Benedictine monk at Marmoutier of the same name.

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<sup>130</sup>This and Roger's other foundations are discussed by Graham Loud. Loud, *The Age of Robert Guiscard* (Harlow, 2000), pages 268 - 278.

The choice of William as author of the *Gesta* suggests that either he was known personally to Urban II and/or Roger Borsa, or that one or both of those patrons chose to have a history composed at Marmoutier and he was the monk upon whom the task fell. There is no direct evidence to link Roger Borsa to Marmoutier, although we might expect him to have heard the tales of the deeds of his brother in law's uncle, Ralph the Clerk/III Tonsured.<sup>131</sup> What is perhaps more curious is that Roger of Sicily, who seems to have always been a strong supporter of Roger Borsa's authority, can be linked to Marmoutier. Roger's second wife's family hailed from Mortain, home to one of Marmoutier's daughter houses. In addition a Marmoutier monk, Ranger, was appointed by Urban II as Archbishop in Roger's own city of Reggio.<sup>132</sup>

The source of Ranger's appointment as Archbishop of Reggio in 1091 is uncertain. As mentioned above, Roger of Sicily's second wife was Eremberga, whose father would have been the patron of a Marmoutier priory until his exile to southern Italy. Eremberga would seem to be the obvious connection between Roger and Marmoutier, but by 1089 she was already dead and Roger had married once again. We cannot look to her therefore as the direct source for the selection of a Marmoutier monk. It thus seems likely that the decision to appoint Ranger was that of Urban II. Urban's canons at the Council of Melfi (discussed with relevance to the *Gesta* in Chapter IV) suggest that he was keen to impose the values and standards of the northern European Church in southern Italy and this may be the reason for the choice of a Marmoutier monk. Ranger's appointment is important for another reason since it may give us an insight into the mind of William of Apulia. The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* ends with a plea for recognition and

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<sup>131</sup>While this is pure speculation, William's Apulian origins do make it possible that Roger Borsa may have been acquainted with him or his family in the past.

<sup>132</sup>As I have argued above, despite the fact that monks often spent time away from Marmoutier engaged in duties at the daughter houses, the seniority of both William of Apulia and Ranger suggests that they would both have been at the abbey long enough to have known each other.

reward from Roger Borsa. What exactly might William have been seeking? As a monk William would not have been able to gain a material award in the form of land or money so perhaps he was seeking an ecclesiastical appointment? Ranger's promotion from being a monk at Marmoutier to Archbishop of Reggio illustrates how possible this was. William may have hoped for a similar position in an Apulian see or perhaps even to become the abbot of one of the prominent Apulian monasteries such as Venosa, which he praised so highly.

The identification of William of Apulia as a monk of Marmoutier has quite strong ramifications for the purpose of the poem. The two most significant pieces of literature to emerge from Marmoutier prior to the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* were histories of the monastery, composed with a view to illustrating the legitimacy of its authority and autonomy from the Archbishop of Tours. As mentioned above, one of these was penned and presented to Urban II in 1095, just prior to the *Gesta's* composition with the result that the papacy confirmed the privileges of the monastery at Clermont. This history was merely a means of legitimising and stressing the status quo since Urban II had already been sufficiently moved by Marmoutier's arguments on this front to grant it exemption from Episcopal jurisdiction and special protection from Rome in 1089.<sup>133</sup> As argued above the *Gesta* aimed to promote the authority of the Hauteville family whose position in southern Italy, while relatively strong, did not have much greater legitimacy than any of their rivals. Another function of the *Gesta*, argued in greater detail in Chapter IV, was to promote the authority of Urban II's papacy against his rival and to illustrate the continuity between his policies and those of his predecessors. The identification of this purpose is made much stronger by the knowledge that its author was a Marmoutier monk. The task

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<sup>133</sup>Farmer, *op. cit.*, page 101. It is possible that Urban requested a written history confirming the legitimacy through precedent of the privileges he had granted in 1089 and this was the document presented in 1095. Urban's decree of 1089 illustrates that he already had experience of Marmoutier's strengths in the field of using interpretations of the past to justify the present.



which the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* performs for the Hautevilles and Urban II is precisely that which Marmoutier's contemporary history performed successfully for its own abbey, convincing Urban II to grant it the privileges it desired. Marmoutier had produced a history which fulfilled precisely the criteria desired by Urban II and the Hautevilles, this fact was known to Urban II and thus when an author had to be selected the scholars of this abbey were the logical candidates. The identification of William of Apulia with the contemporary of the same name at Marmoutier thus confirms our understanding of the *Gesta's* purpose and provides an answer to the question of why a monk resident in France was selected for the task of composing the poem rather than one in southern Italy.

While there are connections between southern Italy and Marmoutier, the circumstances of Ranger's appointment suggest that it was Urban II and not Roger of Sicily who looked to that particular French abbey for a suitable candidate. Similarly there is evidence that the *Gesta* was more the brainchild of Urban II (who had more pressing need for its composition and spent more time in southern Italy than any other eleventh century Pope) rather than Roger Borsa, and thus it seems more likely that Urban (certainly the most educated of the two patrons) would have chosen its author. Urban II's appointment of Ranger at Reggio suggests his appreciation of the quality of Marmoutier monks. We know that Urban visited Marmoutier in March 1096 to confirm its privileges and dedicate its abbey church.<sup>134</sup> On such an occasion we would expect contact between the Pope and the most senior figures in the abbey, one of which was a William of Apulia. If we overlap the timing of Urban's visit with the chronology deduced for the composition of the *Gesta* then his stay at Marmoutier is at the same time we would expect William to have begun to write, at the urgent prompting of the Pope.

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<sup>134</sup>Louis Halphen, *Le comté d'Anjou au XIe siècle* (Paris, 1906), pages 324 - 325

There is therefore a host of small factors that make the identification of the author of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* as the monk of Marmoutier as conclusive as any identification of an author in the eleventh century can be. William's mores (discussed in Chapters III and IV) and Christian name indicate a Norman/Frank cultural background and pro reform papacy stance that would be in keeping with a French Benedictine monk. His cognomen, *Apuliensis*, also indicates that he wrote outside of southern Italy.<sup>135</sup> While Mathieu and Wolf felt that the identification made by the *Histoire Littéraire de la France* was rendered unlikely by the evidence that the Marmoutier monk was in France at the time of the *Gesta's* composition, there is no concrete basis for assuming that William had to be in southern Italy to compose his poem. Marmoutier was a sufficiently famous abbey to attract ambitious clerics from southern Italy whose careers might be further enhanced in France, and there is concrete evidence of links between Marmoutier and that region. The production of a high class history at Marmoutier and its presentation to Urban II in 1095 strengthens the case for Urban choosing a monk from that monastery for the task at hand, even if William was not the author of that earlier history. If William's was the hand behind that other similarly polished work, and Urban did commission the *Gesta* at the earlier date of 1093 after his discussions with the Hauteville brothers at Monte Cassino, then the duties of the monk of Marmoutier go a long way to explaining why a work which Urban II wished to be completed speedily took so long to write.

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<sup>135</sup>The strong emphasis of the identity of city states in southern Italy renders it likely that had he been writing in one of the other southern Italian provinces then he would have been known by the name of his town of origin. *Apuliensis* suggests a cognomen applied for the benefit of those who would not have recognised the name of the precise place of his origins.



## II

### Style

#### A paucity of Religious Metaphor ?

In the last two centuries two studies of William of Apulia's poem, those of Wilmans and more recently Wolf, have perceived in the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* a style of writing which seemed largely bereft of religious formulae.<sup>1</sup> Wilmans even based his identification of William as a layman upon this extremely tentative (and inaccurate) premise, while Kenneth Wolf seems to have followed his conclusions with a greater degree of caution:

It is conceivable that William was a layman. That would help explain the relative paucity of religious motifs in the *Gesta*. Once in a great while William punctuated his account with some formulaic reference to divine involvement - *Deo nolente* or *spirante Deo* - but this was not typical. He acknowledged the role of providence behind the rise of the Normans, but rarely did William identify its workings as the Norman destiny unfolded.<sup>2</sup>

It is hard to understand the textual ground upon which Wilmans and subsequently Wolf have reached their conclusions. Wolf in particular seems to have ignored Mathieu's quick dismissal of Wilmans' theory on the grounds of the evident devotion to the papacy throughout the text and its pious beginning and end.<sup>3</sup> In fact, as will be demonstrated

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<sup>1</sup>Wolf, page 124; R. Wilmans, *Ueber die Quellen der Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, MGH SS IX, page 239, in Mathieu, pages 23 - 24.

<sup>2</sup>Wolf, page 124.

<sup>3</sup>"Mais on pourrait invoquer le début et la fin pieux de son poème, sa dévotion à Urbain II, à saint Matthieu et à Grégoire VII, une certaine teinture de théologie." Mathieu, pages 23 - 24. Mathieu gives

below, the *Gesta* is punctuated with regular references, both oblique and direct, to the importance of the Christian faith and to the involvement of God in the affairs of man. There are, moreover, two very good reasons why William's poem seems to have fewer references to the divine than we might otherwise have expected from a monk of Marmoutier: the first of these is his poem itself, of which there is every indication (in its beautiful verse, epic simile, and predominant focus on a single individual and on military affairs) that it was penned as much for entertainment as for its role as a functional history; and the second is the nature and content of the opening lines of the *Gesta*.

William's literary predecessor, Dudo of St Quentin, at the end of the first book of his *History of the Normans*, having described the terrible afflictions the (then) pagan Normans under the leadership of Alstingus caused the Franks, remarked

Lest any reader should shudder at the humiliation of the unhappy misfortunes of the Franks, we inform him that these befell them 'not for their destruction, but for their correction', on account of their accumulated misdeeds. For the Frankish nation was crushed because it was overflowing with foul indecencies, and Alstingus was punisher... It would be a long business for us to include all the tribulations of that time within our narrative, and for that reason we quickly divert our presumptuous pen to what we proposed to undertake. That pen, though unskilful, will therefore briefly bring to light what was done with God's approval...<sup>4</sup>

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a detailed list of the oblique echoes from the Old Testament within the *Gesta*. My reading of the text suggests that while it had an extremely political purpose, it was designed to influence through entertainment, and thus William would have avoided at all costs overburdening his poem with lengthily biblical references which would have been impossible to incorporate into the hexameter verse.

<sup>4</sup>DsQ, I, page 22.

Dudo thus portrayed the Normans (and Alstingus in particular in this instance) as God's tool. The consequences of their actions, however unpleasant for the Franks, were a just manifestation of divine will. Echoing Dudo, the opening lines of William's poem leave no uncertainties as to the role of God in the events that follow:

After it became pleasing to the powerful King to change the epochs and the kingdoms, so that the region of Apulia, possessed by the Greeks for a long time, should now no longer be inhabited by them, the people of the Normans that is noted for its rough knights entered, and through driving out the Greeks ruled the Latin territory.<sup>5</sup>

The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* states with absolutely no ambiguity at its outset that the supplanting of Greek rule by the Normans was a manifestation of divine will. This is the reason for any apparent paucity of religious metaphors on William's part: the positioning of this declaration at the very start of his poem makes it clear that everything that the work subsequently relates occurred because 'it became pleasing to the powerful King to change the epochs and the kingdoms'. Far from portraying God as being a relatively absentee figure in the *Gesta*, William makes it clear that God was the driving force behind the deeds of Robert Guiscard and his fellow Normans.<sup>6</sup> Every event recounted in the *Gesta* stems from its opening five lines.

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<sup>5</sup>*Postquam complacuit regi mutare potenti  
Tempora cum regnis, ut Graecis Apula tellus  
Iam possessa diu non amplius incoletur,  
Gens Normannorum feritate insignis equestri  
Intrat, et expulsis Latio dominatur Achivis.* WA, I, lines 1 - 5, page 98.

<sup>6</sup>Capitani suggested that William of Apulia's account implied a religious motivation for the Norman invasion of southern Italy. This is not the case. William suggested that God's will was the driving force behind it, but clearly stated that the Normans were motivated by wealth and opportunity. Capitani, O., 'Specific motivations and Continuing themes in the Norman Chronicles of Southern Italy in the eleventh and twelfth centuries', in *The Normans in Sicily and Southern Italy* (Oxford, 1974), pages 1 - 46. WA, I, lines 35 - 38, page 100.

Despite this precursive introduction to the work, there are in fact a large number of oblique references to the role of God throughout William's poem. William followed his statement of the divine ordination of the expulsion of the Greeks with an account of how the Normans came to be in Italy, about which Wolf commented that

though William located the initial meeting of Melo and the Normans at the shrine of St. Michael at Monte Gargano, he made nothing of the pilgrim status of the Normans, saying only that they had come to 'fulfil a vow.'<sup>7</sup>

But the *Gesta's* account of the very first Normans being encouraged to come to Italy while fulfilling a vow to the Archangel Michael (significantly the guardian of God's chosen people in the Old Testament), receiving this mission while both on 'the heights of Mount Gargano' and upon the hallowed ground of the Archangel's shrine, is loaded with symbolism. The altitude, holy ground, pilgrim status and object of their vow all convey the sense of a divine mission being handed to the Normans.<sup>8</sup> William would not have *needed* to add any further qualifications to these lines for any audience that had merely a passing familiarity with biblical stories, and to do so immediately following such powerfully precursory lines would have been heavy-handed and inconsistent with his customary delicacy.

Later in the same book William illustrated his grasp of Christian doctrine with a passing reference to complex theology, criticising the beliefs of a contemporary eastern heretical sect, the Patipassianists,<sup>9</sup> on the nature of Christ and the Holy Spirit:

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<sup>7</sup>Wolf, end note, page 139.

<sup>8</sup>WA, I, lines 11 - 27, pages 98 - 100.

<sup>9</sup>William does not himself identify the sect and it is possible that he may have intended his audience to

the worst delusion had induced these men to insanity, and from this they have their name: these men are accustomed to say that the Father suffered with Christ, and the sign of the cross is made on the brow with one finger; they instruct that the son is not another person than the Father and neither is the Holy Spirit.<sup>10</sup>

A large part of the third book is devoted to the conquest of Sicily which is portrayed as a Crusade by William.<sup>11</sup> At Dyrrakhion though Robert

saw the innumerable troops of the army of Alexius coming towards him, because the Pope had entrusted him with a banner in honour of Peter (the greatest of the shepherds) and confident in the merits of Saint Matthew (for whom he had built a church), he forced his way into the enemy.<sup>12</sup>

William thus portrays Robert here as gaining his courage from a sense of divine support rather than confidence in his own martial prowess. This image of the pious Robert echoed an earlier statement in the *Gesta* through which we can see the keenness of the

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assume that their beliefs were those of the Greek Church itself, but it is clear from his description that the men he criticises were Patipassianists. WA, I, lines 334 - 339, page 116.

<sup>10</sup>...*quos pessimus error*

*Fecerat amentes, et ab ipso nomen habebant:*

*Plebs solet ista Patrem cum Christo dicere passum,*

*Et fronti digito signum crucis imprimit uno;*

*Non aliam Nati personam quam Patris esse,*

*Hanc etiam Sancti Spiraminis esse docebant.*' WA, I, lines 334 - 339, page 116.

<sup>11</sup>This characterisation will be discussed in greater detail below.

<sup>12</sup>*Et licet innumeras videat properare catervas*

*Partis Alexinae, vexillo, quod sibi, papa*

*Ad petri dederat summi pastoris honorem,*

*Et meritis sancti, cuius fabricaverat aedes,*

*Mathaei fidens, non diffidentur in hostem*

*Irruit...*' WA, IV, lines 407 - 412, page 226.

Marmoutier monk to dispel the human conceit that martial abilities or numerical superiority had anything to do with the outcome of battles:

But not by numbers, nor horses, nor race, nor arms, but to whom by  
heaven it is given, is victory in war.<sup>13</sup>

William further highlighted the pervasive role of the Church in everyday life through his account of Robert's grief at the death of Gregory VII. The importance of Church ritual and duties (as well as the strength of Robert's own religious convictions) were further illustrated by the poet's emphasis on Robert's taking of communion before passing away.

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While the opening lines of the *Gesta* establish that all the events that follow do so as part of divine will, the poem does on occasion punctuate important moments with further direct references to God's influence. In this manner William attributed the cause of the Emperor Michael IV's demise to "God no longer willing the power of that man to remain."<sup>15</sup> One of the less surprising yet significant reminders of divine guidance in the *Gesta* is the attribution of the First Crusade by William to "God's design" (*spirante Deo*).<sup>16</sup> But the poem is also keen to stress that God protects as well as punishes. Hence Robert Guiscard recovered from a chest injury at the siege of Salerno through "God's succour" (*auxiliante Deo*) and Sichelgaita survived an arrow wound at Dyrrakhion because "God delivered her" (*hanc Deus eripuit*)<sup>17</sup> Compared with the first four books the final segment

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<sup>13</sup> *At non in numero, nec equis, nec gente, nec armis,  
Sed cui de coelo datur, est victoria belli.* WA, II, lines 146 - 147, page 140.

<sup>14</sup> WA, V, lines 331 - 332, page 254. Robert's relationship with Gregory is discussed in depth in Chapter IV.

<sup>15</sup> *Inde manere Deo nolente diucius eius  
Imperium.* WA, I, lines 402 - 403, page 120.

<sup>16</sup> WA, III, line 104, page 168.

<sup>17</sup> WA, III, line 455, page 188; WA, IV, line 430, page 226.

of the *Gesta* does seem to be relatively bereft of religious allusions, yet this is offset by William's lengthy eulogy of Gregory VII.

In conclusion therefore a consistent theme of divine providence runs throughout the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*. While, as Wolf has noted, the number of direct references to the supernatural may seem to be small compared to his contemporary Amatus of Montecassino, this stems from the strength of William's opening lines, precursory of the story that follows. William's touch is the delicate hand of a highly skilled poet. This subtlety enabled him to devote more attention to milking the otherwise epic feel of his poem. The few references that William does make should be regarded merely as exclamation marks in a constant theme established at the beginning of the work - a theme that a mediaeval reader would most likely have assumed without prompting. The strength of William's opening lines actually highlights his own sense of the role of God in the affairs of man and in the absence of any other information would provide one of the strongest clues to William's identity as a man of the Church.<sup>18</sup> The direct reference to God at the conclusion of the Marmoutier monk's poem unifies the beginning and end, thus forming a cycle in the *Gesta* reminiscent of his opening reference to the seasons. William ends his poem with a prayer for the souls of Robert and his brothers buried at Venosa: "May the heavenly King three and one be merciful to them."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>William's specific criticism of the heretics also identifies him with the Church.

<sup>19</sup>'*Det veniae munus rex illis trinus et unus.*' WA, V, line 409, page 258.



## Epic Language

One of the most important aspects of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardii*, which naturally affects the style and nature of the characterisations within, is William's choice to set his account within the framework of an epic genre highly reminiscent of the *Aeneid* of Virgil, whom he compared himself to both obliquely and directly at the beginning and end of his work respectively:

The poets of old wrote of the deeds of old; as a modern authority  
I shall set about relating the events of recent times.<sup>20</sup>

You know, Roger, that I have written these verses for you. The poet has joyfully done his best to fulfil your instructions. Authors always deserve cheerful benefactors. You, my Duke, are worthier than the Roman Duke Octavian. Be for me, I beseech you, the hope of some good, as he was for Maro.<sup>21</sup>

William's choice of style for his poem was certainly ambitious, but not without precedent. As Orderic Vitalis recorded,

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<sup>20</sup>*Gesta ducum veterum veteres cecinere poetae; Aggrediar vates novus edere gesta novorum.* WA, Preface, lines I - II, page 98

<sup>21</sup>*Nostra, Rogere, tibi, cognoscis carmina scribi. Mente tibi laeta studuit parere poeta. Semper et auctores hilares meruere datores: Tu duce Romano dux dignior Octaviano, Sis mihi, quaeso, boni spes, ut fuit ille Maroni.* WA, V, lines 410 - 414, page 258.

Guy bishop of Amiens also wrote a poem describing the battle of Senlac in imitation of the epics of Vergil and Statius, abusing and condemning Harold, but praising and exalting William.<sup>22</sup>

This poem is probably the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*.<sup>23</sup> Whether it is or not, the significance of Orderic's reference is that there was a poem dedicated to William I written in classical style and presented to the Anglo-Norman Court. Just as this poem praised William and vilified Harold the *Gesta* praised Robert and vilified his varied rivals. It is not improbable, given the close links between Marmoutier and Duke William, that as a monk at the aforementioned abbey William of Apulia would have either known of this work or even read/heard it himself. The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* echoes Duke William's martial prowess at Hastings in its account of the Battle of Civitate: Robert Guiscard had to be portrayed as at least equal to the Norman Duke.<sup>24</sup> Is it not probable that knowledge of this poem celebrating the deeds of William the Conqueror influenced the *Gesta's* style and possibly may even have been the spur for Roger Borsa's desire for its commission?

Kenneth Wolf, believing that there was a narrative imbalance in the text between the quantity of epic elements in the opening books of the *Gesta* and the number of motifs to be found in Books Four and Five, suggested that

having pushed his choice of framework hard at the beginning of his account, William could afford to let up at the midway point and allow its inertia to carry it though to the end.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>M. Chibnall, ed., *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis* (Oxford, 1969), pages 184 - 186.

<sup>23</sup>E. Van Houts, 'Latin poetry and the Anglo-Norman Court 1066-1135: The *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*', *Journal of Medieval History* Vol. 15 (Amsterdam, 1989) pages 39 - 62.

<sup>24</sup>See Chapter IV for a fuller discussion.

<sup>25</sup>Wolf, page 138.

He was not the only historian to fail to observe this element of William's style closely; Mathieu herself believed that

the epic traits and clichés diminish in measure as the work advances towards the time of the author; less perceptible in the siege of Bari, they disappear almost entirely in the last two books.<sup>26</sup>

These statements are inaccurate. William's poem did not suffer from an imbalance of style. An examination of both the language and motif of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* will illustrate how the poet maintained his exciting genre to the end.

The table in Chapter Three detailing the variety and quantity of the various terms used to describe the Greeks clearly shows how William used racial terms with classical overtones consistently throughout the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*.<sup>27</sup> In fact a comparison between his use of the more contemporary (in terms of current use rather than its antiquity) *Graeci* with alternative (and more classical) terms shows that while they are used equally in the first two books, thereafter William collectively used the alternative terms (*Danae*, *Argi*, *Pelasgi*, *Achivi*, *Argolicae*, *Argivae*, *Achaeae*) twice as frequently. While the number of references to the Greeks in Books Two and Three fell, William compensated by employing a greater range of classical names such as *Samnites*, *Sabini*, *Ausonii*, and *Latii* when referring to the Italians and he tended to use the terms *Suevi* and *Teutonici* for the Germans rather than *Alemanni*, thus ensuring that the classical undertone of the poem remained constant.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>“Traits épiques et clichés diminuent à mesure que l’oeuvre avance vers le temps de l’auteur; moins sensibles dans la siège de Bari, ils disparaissent presque entièrement dans les deux derniers livres.” Mathieu, page 58.

<sup>27</sup>See below.

<sup>28</sup>See below.

William maintained an unbroken flow of epic similes within the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* from beginning to end. Kenneth Wolf commented on six of these,<sup>29</sup> but in fact there are ten in all, distributed through the five books in the pattern 2, 3, 1, 2, 2. In addition to these similes William was careful to make a number of references to classical figures and events, seven in total, following a pattern 2, 1, 1, 1, 2. When the Normans had increased courage following their first victory over the Greeks the *Gesta* commented that

In the same way the sparrow hawk is accustomed to strive after smaller birds without doubt, hesitating to go attacking others greater, but if by chance it is able to overcome one crane, thereafter it will not be afraid of a swan, and now it will not fear to stand in the way of the greatest birds.<sup>30</sup>

Subsequently the challenges raised by the Norman leader William de Hauteville against his Greek foes were similar to

an enchanter eager to capture an asp... This snake, so that it might know nothing disagreeable through its ears, blocks one by attaching its tail, the other by fastening to the earth. In the same way the Greeks feigned not to hear the Gauls calling for battle.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Wolf, page 130.

<sup>30</sup>*Haut secus accipiter solitus captare minores  
Indubitanter aves, dubitans maioris inire  
Alitis assultum, poterit si forte vel unam  
Exsuperare gruem, non inde timebit olorem,  
Et magnis avibus iam nil obstare pavebit.* WA, I, lines 292 - 296, page 114.

<sup>31</sup>*Sic incantator studiosus pro capienda*

*Aspide...*

*...Auribus haec nequid grave sentiat, obstruit unam*

*Affixa cauda, defigitur altera terrae.*

*Dissimulant Danaei Gallos audire cientes*

*Ad pugnam.* WA, I, lines 547 - 8, 550 - 553, page 128. The comparison of the Greeks to a venomous snake is hardly a flattering one.

The proud history of the Greeks and the conquests of Alexander and the Mycenaean sack of Troy were then related by the General Exaugustus to “remind the reader of the epic tradition that extolled the accomplishments of the ancient Greeks”<sup>32</sup> and William made reference to Hannibal and the Carthaginian subjection of Italy when describing George Maniaces’ campaign.<sup>33</sup> At Civitate William said of the clash of the Italian contingent and Richard of Aversa’s charge that

When they came together, just as while the sparrow hawk attacks pigeons  
of the air, fleeing with utmost speed they try to seek the jagged heights of  
lofty mountains; however those it seizes are able to seek shelter no longer;  
thus Richard and those turning tail.<sup>34</sup>

In the same battle Robert Guiscard’s attack on the Germans was likened to a Lion “throwing down all the herd in death.”<sup>35</sup> William did not merely praise Guiscard when he ascribed his cognomen to the fact that “neither Cicero nor the ingenious Ulysses was so shrewd”<sup>36</sup> - he deliberately drew attention to the greatest figures of the past, showing how they paled before the Norman leader. To William’s imaginative mind the defenders at Bari and the Normans contended like two wild boars, savagely gouging each other until

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<sup>32</sup>Wolf, page 138.

<sup>33</sup>The *Aeneid* explained the origins of the rivalry between Carthage and Rome. WA, I, lines 455- 457, page 122.

<sup>34</sup>*Qualiter aërias, ubi convenere, palumbes,  
Dum petit accipiter, fugitivo summa volatu  
Et scopulosa facit celsi iuga quaerere montis;  
Quas tamen ipse capit, non possunt amplius ullum  
Quaerere confugium: sic dantes terga Ricardus.* WA, II, lines 202 - 206, page 142.

<sup>35</sup>*affligens pecus exitialiter omne* WA, II, line 233, page 144.

<sup>36</sup>*Non Cicero tantae fuit aut versutus Ulixes.* WA, II, line 130, page 138.

one or the other submits.<sup>37</sup> At Palermo Robert knew how to use his men to their best advantage

In the same way a skilled charioteer knows when his fast horses are yielding in the race, uses them carefully, and allows them to tarry; thereafter when they have been restored with renewed snorting, he urges them to go onto the course undertaken and drives them with frequent spurs while they complete the track; having conquered those which are used to lead the way and be successful, through superior cautious driving.<sup>38</sup>

Before even reaching Sicily Guiscard's fleet had to pass the dreaded Scilla and Charybis at the straits of Messina which so plagued Ulysses.<sup>39</sup> The relationship of Dyrrakhion to Pyrrhus, the descendent of the Greek hero Achilles was recalled as the Norman Duke prepared to besiege it.<sup>40</sup> The Greek troops sent to relieve the city assemble together "and the hills and the plains were covered in the manner of locusts."<sup>41</sup> Even Roger Borsa, traditionally portrayed by modern historians as a meek and weak ruler, vented his rage on his erstwhile captors like a loosened tigress who

if she is strong enough to leave by breaking the bars, she displays unusual  
fury because she devours and tears everything she sees; the lion himself

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<sup>37</sup>WA, II, lines 508 - 515, page 160.

<sup>38</sup>*Sic auriga bonus veloces cedere cursu*

*Dum cognoscit equos, parcit, patiturque morari;*

*Inde reformatos reparatis flatibus ire*

*Coeptum cogit iter, stimulisque frequentibus urget,*

*Dum cursum peragant, et eos praecedere victi*

*Vincere qui soleant, cauto ducente magistro.* WA, III, lines 299 - 304, page 180.

<sup>39</sup>WA, III, line 193, page 174.

<sup>40</sup>WA, IV, lines 235 - 243, page 216.

<sup>41</sup>*More locustarum montes et plana teguntur.* WA, IV, line 363, page 224.

running takes refuge from the enraged animal, although she is smaller in body and he the stronger.<sup>42</sup>

At the siege of Larissa, which William reminded his audience was “the birthplace of Achilles, the executor of the destruction of Troy,”<sup>43</sup> Robert’s eldest son Boamund “charged and pressed upon the frightened enemies as the hawk does larks.”<sup>44</sup> Finally the Greeks fled from the naval assault of Roger Borsa

like birds who dare not oppose a speeding eagle, or hares which are forced to hide by running swiftly, so they will not be seized by the eagle’s talons, fearing to be food for its ravenous beak.<sup>45</sup>

A natural feature of any epic is the presence of portentous events to foreshadow the twists of human history. Wolf remarked that “there are only two recorded portents in the *Gesta*: a deep freeze that William connected to the arrival of the Normans in Italy and the landing of a huge fish in Apulia which preceded the conquest of Palermo.”<sup>46</sup>

The only other possible omen was the observation that prior to Robert Guiscard’s death

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<sup>42</sup>*Saepe solet captae sic tigridis ira latenter,  
Dum nullos agitare potest inclusa furores,  
Quae si forte valet ruptis excedere claustris,  
Quod videt omne vorat, rapit, insolitumque furorem  
Exerit; occursus leo perfugit ipse furentis,  
Quamvis ista minor sit corpore, fortior ille.* WA, IV, lines 518 - 23, page 232.

<sup>43</sup>*Prodiit hac auctor Troianae cladis Achilles.* WA, V, line 29, page 236.

<sup>44</sup>*Irruit et trepidos hostes, ut nisus alaudas,  
Insequitur.* WA, V, lines 36 - 37, page 238.

<sup>45</sup>*...ut aves obstare volanti  
Non audent aquilae, cursuque latere fugaci  
Coguntur lepores, dum ne rapiantur aduncis  
Unguibus et rostro metuunt cibus esse voraci.* WA, V, lines 180 - 183, page 246.

<sup>46</sup>Wolf, page 124.



the glowing Dog Star began to flame, whose most violent brilliance in summer is wont to be harmful to mortals.<sup>47</sup>

but since this was a seasonal phenomenon it is more likely that William was merely drawing a connection between summer and fevers.

In this manner through similes, references to classical events and personages, portents and continuous use of racial terminology that echoed the ancient peoples of Italy's literary past, William upheld a strong epic theme throughout the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*. The Marmoutier monk did not merely push his choice of framework hard at the beginning of his account; to coin a biological analogy we might envisage William's strong religious undertone as the skeleton of his work, the characters and events as its flesh and blood, but the epic genre formed the skin of this body - surrounding it and holding it together from beginning to end. It must therefore have been with great satisfaction as well as justification that the last word of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* that William penned was *Maroni*.

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<sup>47</sup>...*Flagare Canicula fervens*  
*Cooperat, aestiva cuius saevissimus ardor*  
*Tempestate solet mortalibus esse nocivus.*' WA, V, lines 289 - 291, page 252.

### III

## Racial Stereotypes

This chapter individually examines each different national/cultural group found within the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* in order to ascertain what stereotypical traits may be evident from the content and context of William's words. In addition to this a study has been made of the range of names applied to these racial groups. This serves both to illustrate the compass and depth of William's Latin and, by revealing the frequency of the participation of different groups throughout the different stages of the poem, to quantify the external scope and focus of the *Gesta*.

### The Inhabitants of Germany

The inhabitants of Germany play an essentially peripheral role in the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*. It would be hard, perusing William's work, to believe that the Germans had any political ambitions in southern Italy, for their only presence in the south revolves around the Papacy - firstly as part of Leo IX's army and secondly in a campaign to isolate Gregory VII from southern support. The role that William gave them is thus through its omission of any reference to the existence of German claims to political legitimacy or jurisdiction in the southern peninsula both a political statement itself and a reflection perhaps of the reality that only a ruler with a strong and permanent military presence could enforce his authority on the fiercely independent cities of southern Italy. Despite

this marginal role in the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, William's characterisation of the contingent present at the Battle of Civitate allows us a small glimpse of the stereotypical German.

William was very complimentary about the martial prowess and bravery of the German contingent at Civitate (which he estimated numbered about seven hundred men<sup>1</sup>), but commented that

they are wary so far as not to control horses; for in the blows of those men there is more strength from swords than from the lance, for in their hands a horse is not wheeled skilfully.<sup>2</sup>

But, in an age where the presence and skill of mounted men was becoming paramount, William observed that this was no disadvantage

for the swords of those men are peculiar of length and very sharp; and standing firmly on foot, after having dismounted from the horses, they are often accustomed to cleave the smitten body from the head. They wish to perish in battle rather than turn tail. They are more to be feared in battle this way, than while they are mounted; such is the bravery of the race.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>WA, II, lines 151 - 153, page 140.

<sup>2</sup>...sed equos adeo non ducere cauta.

*Ictibus illorum, quam lancea, plus valet ensis;*

*Nam nec equus docte manibus giratur eorum.*' WA, II, lines 154 - 156, page 140.

<sup>3</sup>*Sunt etenim longi specialiter et peracuti*

*Illorum gladii; percussum a vertice corpus*

*Scindere saepe solent, et firmo stant pede, postquam*

*Deponuntur equis. Potius certando perire,*

*Quam dare terga volunt. Magis hoc sunt Marte timendi,*

*Quam dum sunt equites: tanta est audacia gentis.*' WA, II, lines 158 - 163, page 140.

William did not exaggerate the courage of the Germans who, cut off from reinforcements and unable to flee, chose to fight to the last man and perish rather than surrender.<sup>4</sup>

The courage and military finesse of the Germans perhaps also gave rise to their chief vice, arrogance. It is not so much the last stand of the German contingent at Civitate that lingers in the memory as their arrogant dismissal of the Norman peace envoys, refusing even to listen to the proposals of a people they regarded as inferior:

They have not yet experienced the swords of the Teutons. They will be destroyed with swords, or compelled to go, because if they do not wish to do so of their own accord, they will leave the land unwillingly.<sup>5</sup>

The *Gesta* draws a revealing comparison not only in the difference between the military tactics of the Normans and the Germans but also in the physical characteristics of the two peoples. William observed that

the Teutons, because their hair and form had made them outstandingly handsome, with their tall bodies, mocked the Norman bodies, which appeared to be shorter.<sup>6</sup>

It was perhaps because of this insult that William, following his account of Robert Guiscard's valour in battle, took pains to point out that Robert "showed that often

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<sup>4</sup>WA, II, lines 251 - 256, page 146.

<sup>5</sup>*Nondum sunt gladios experti Teutonicorum.*

*Intereant gladiis, aut compellantur abire,*

*Invitque solum, quod nolunt sponte, reliquant.* 'WA, II, lines 103 - 105, page 136.

<sup>6</sup>*Teutonici, quia caesaries et forma decoros*

*Fecerat egregie proceri corporis illos,*

*Corpore derident Normanica, quae breviora*

*Esse videbantur.* 'WA, II, lines 93 - 96, page 136.

smaller bodies have a surplus of glory which is not sustained by larger men.”<sup>7</sup> The observation of the uncommon tallness of the Germans should perhaps be coupled with their reluctance to fight on horseback and their preference for long blades. The depiction of Norman cavalry on the Bayeux tapestry might suggest that while the Norman horses were tremendously strong, they were hardly particularly tall and the stirrups of the riders seem quite close to the ground in comparison with the modern breeds that we are familiar.<sup>8</sup> If as William suggests the Normans were a fairly short people this might explain why they came to be regarded as the greatest horsemen of the eleventh century - they were better disposed than others to make good use of their mounts. The Germans’ misplaced arrogant confidence in their size and abilities was illustrated by the fact that at Civitate “not so much as one from that people survived.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>*Virtutisque docet palmam non affore tantum*

*Corporibus magnis, qua saepe minora redundant.*’ WA, II, lines 240 - 241, page 144.

<sup>8</sup>R.H.C. Davis has suggested that while the ‘best’ mounts may have been as high as fourteen hands, a specimen of twelve hands would have been considered good and 10 - 12 hands passable. R.H.C. Davis, ‘The Warhorses of the Normans’, *Anglo-Norman Studies X* (Boydell Press, 1987), page 80. It is possible though to place too much significance on the relative scales depicted in such works. As Robert Bartlett has pointed out, Davis’ evidence for the growth of horses between the mid-eleventh and thirteenth centuries depended largely on their depiction on seals and to apply the same methodology elsewhere would “support the claim that medieval merchant ships were no bigger than rowing boats.” Bartlett, *Op. Cit.*, page 329.

<sup>9</sup>‘...et tanta superest de gente nec unus.’ WA, II, line 256, page 146.

Terms referring to the Inhabitants of Germany				
<i>Term</i>	<i>Frequency</i>			<i>Total</i>
	Book I	Book II	Book IV	
<i>Teutonici</i>		12		12
<i>Alemanni</i>	1	3	1	5
<i>Suevi</i>		4		4
<i>Saxones</i>			2	2
<i>Lotharingi</i>			1	1
<i>Barbaries</i>			1	1

William's preference for using the terms *Teutonici* and *Suevi* reflect his adoption of a classical style for the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, although (as with his description of the Italian peoples at Civitate) he was not averse to using overlapping terminology to exaggerate the threat to the Normans, such as when he described the presence of "innumerable Germans and Teutons" (*Alemannis innumeris et Teutonicis*).<sup>10</sup> Despite this example the *Gesta* makes no recognisable distinction between the terms *Teutonici*, *Alemanni* and *Suevi*; the three are interchangeable. For example, William described how the Teutons mocked the Norman embassy, boasting about the prowess of the "swords of the Teutons" (*Teutoni*) - but then related how the returning Normans "unfolded the vain reply of the Germans" (*Alemanni*).<sup>11</sup> Werner and Albert, "the leaders of the Teutons (*Teutoni*) had not brought

<sup>10</sup>WA, II, lines 83 - 84, page 136.

<sup>11</sup>WA, II, lines 113- 114, page 138.

with them more than seven hundred Swabians (*Sueni*)", but the *Sueni* that resist Humphrey de Hauteville and his brother Robert Guiscard were subsequently described as *Teutoni*.<sup>12</sup> Interestingly the term *Alemanni* is never used in descriptions of combative action and is the only one of the three used in direct conjunction with the Emperors Henry II and Henry IV.

In contrast with those three names, which can be seen to be used by William as umbrella terms rather than descriptions of tribal groups, the terms *Saxones* and *Lotharingi* are used to refer directly to particular peoples within the German empire. The *Gesta* refers to the supporters of Henry IV as *Saxones* and the supporters of Welf IV of Bavaria and Rudolf of Swabia as *Lotharingi* (although William does simplify slightly by only referring to the major 'ethnic' group within each political faction). One of the most insightful choices of phrase that William makes is his decision to describe the German army of Henry IV that besieged Gregory VII at Rome as *Barbaries*. William's meticulous avoidance of insults elsewhere in his treatment of the German peoples would suggest that he is employing this term not so much because of who the Germans are but because of what they are doing. William clearly regarded armed opposition to the Pope to be a barbarian act and his particular turn of phrase emphasises once more the promotion of the cause of the reform papacy within the text. The evil of the Germans' opposition to Gregory VII would most likely have been exacerbated in his eyes by the siege of Rome, a city still regarded as the birthplace of all that was civilised in the mediaeval world. The use of *Barbaries* thus plays a clever literary device, drawing a parallel between the forces of Henry IV and the uncivilised hordes who sacked Rome in the fourth century AD.

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<sup>12</sup>WA, II, lines 210 - 256, pages 142 - 144.



One of the most interesting omissions on William's part, evident from the table above, and certainly linked to the absence of any reference to German political claims in the peninsula, is recognition of the German Kings Henry II and Henry IV as emperors. This might be understandable in the case of Henry IV, whose title was not recognised by Pope Gregory VII, but the earlier omission of the dignity in connection with Henry II suggests that the title may not have been recognised in the southern peninsula. It would seem unlikely that William did this from spite, particularly as he gives an extremely favourable account of Henry II, recording how the exiled Lombard leader of the Normans Melo

sued for the aid of King Henry of the Germans, who with his usual mildness supported the request, promising gifts of assistance near at hand. But Melo was unable to return, being prevented by death. King Henry performed the funeral rites for that man as if he were a king, following the funeral procession all the way to the grave, and he distinguished the tomb of the interred man with a royal epitaph.<sup>13</sup>

Melo's death may have prevented Henry from providing him with aid (which would hardly have been 'free' since it would have furthered his own political ambitions in the south) but the German was at least able to give his erstwhile ally a decent burial. However, while the two Henrys may not have been termed emperors, William related that common rumour was that Gregory VII had "promised the crown of the Roman kingdom" (*Romani regni sibi promisisse coronam*) to Robert because of Henry IV's moral

<sup>13</sup>...*Alemannorum petit suffragia regis  
Henrici, solito placidus qui more precantem  
Suscipit, auxilii promittens dona propinqui.  
At Melus regredi praeventus morte nequivit.  
Henricus sepelit rex hunc ut regius est mos.  
Funeris exequias comitatus adusque sepulcrum,  
Carminе regali tumulum decoravit humati.* WA, I, lines 97 - 103, page 104.

laxity.<sup>14</sup> Thus while there was a tacit recognition that an entity other than the Papacy and the Byzantine Empire could be termed Roman, it is perhaps significant of the different natures of the two political bodies that William always referred to the gain or loss of the throne of the Byzantine empire while the only reference to the western dignity revolved around the bestowing of a crown. In the eyes of the people of Southern Italy, so long under the Byzantine yoke, the term 'Roman' would always bring the political entity of the east rather than the north to mind. Those *Franci*, *Normanni* or *Galli* living in Southern Italy, even if they were not influenced by the culture of the lands they had settled, came from a land which regarded its royalty as equally derived from Charlemagne (though they chose to circumvent the authority of that monarchy wherever possible), and thus were likewise disinclined to recognise German pretensions to an imperial title, which implied an element of superiority.<sup>15</sup> William uses the term '*Romani Regni*' to describe the western empire, the term '*regnum*' is never used for the Byzantine Empire, only '*imperium*'. For this reason I would translate '*regnum*' as kingdom rather than empire. Western emperors were termed "Kings of the Romans" prior to their Papal coronation, hence perhaps William's use of the phrase "Roman kingdom", but if the rumour was that Gregory wanted to supplant Henry IV with Robert<sup>16</sup> why did William not refer to the possibility of Robert Guiscard, whose stature he was extolling, becoming emperor? It is unlikely that Gregory would have wanted Robert as emperor: the union of the lands to the north and south of the papal domains in the hands of one ruler was not politically desirable - if Gregory had offered the title it is more likely to have been as a threat to Henry in an attempt to bring him into line rather than any desire to bestow the dignity on Robert.<sup>17</sup> Even so, it seems

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<sup>14</sup>WA, IV, lines 31 - 41, pages 204 - 206.

<sup>15</sup>The problems involved in determining what, if any, difference in status there was between Emperors and Kings at this time are visible in the relationships between the Emperor Manuel Comnenus and the French and German kings during the Second Crusade.

<sup>16</sup>Highly unlikely since Papal policy throughout the mediaeval period and beyond would always try and ensure that the lands to the North and South of the Papal states would remain, for its own security, in the hands of different rulers.

<sup>17</sup>It is possible that this promise could have been recorded (or even invented) by William in view of

bizarre that William describes Gregory offering a title that we would associate with an 'emperor elect' prior to coronation rather than an emperor himself. The solution, borne out by his omission of the dignity in his description of Henry II, is that William chose to portray the Germans as kings rather than emperors. It may be that the source of this omission of the imperial dignity was the desire of the reform papacy for a closer relationship with the Byzantine Empire and the possibility of engendering a reunion of sorts between the eastern and western churches. Elsewhere in the *Gesta* William's portrayal of Alexius Comnenus is extremely complimentary.<sup>18</sup> It is likely therefore that the political needs of Urban II to contest the legitimacy of Henry II and his antipope Clement III and his resultant desire to seek closer ties with the Byzantine Empire are the source of William's promotion of Byzantine imperial legitimacy and omission of German *imperium*. For this reason, when William referred to both bodies in the same sentence, describing the pinnacle of Robert Guiscard's career, these are the words he chose:

Thus two of the masters of the earth were defeated at one time; the King  
of the Germans and the mighty ruler of the Roman Empire.<sup>19</sup>

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Urban II's exasperation with Henry IV's continued support of the antipope Clement III. Robert Guiscard's heir, Duke Roger Borsa, had a very good record with regard to papal relations (and backed by Boamund and Roger of Sicily would have been a formidable opponent). Perhaps this phrase should be viewed as suggesting/inventing a precedent for alternative southern Italian candidates for the crown of the German Empire?

<sup>18</sup>The precise nature of William's portrayal of Alexius and its significance is discussed in full in the 'exceptions to the rule' section at the end of this chapter.

<sup>19</sup>'...*Sic uno tempore victi*

*Sunt terrae domini duo, rex Alemannicus iste,*

*Imperii rector Romani maximus ille.*' WA, IV, lines 566 - 568, page 234.

## The Sicilians

In William's account the conquest of Palermo was foreshadowed by the omen of the capture, slaughter and consumption by the peoples of Calabria and Apulia of a "great fish with a fearful body and an extraordinary shape" which appeared in the shallows of the Adriatic Sea washing the Calabrian coast.<sup>20</sup> If this was indeed an omen of Palermo's fall, it would, with teleological hindsight, seem appropriate for the eventual fate of the island of Sicily, subsumed as it is today by the Italian peninsula. One of the great similarities between this omen and William's portrayal of the Sicilians, is that even as one might imagine that such a great fish had the potential to cause injury, there is no evidence that it ever did so. In the same vein the *Gesta's* account of the conquest of Sicily curiously lacks any of the normal justifications for conquest: wealth, fertile lands or retaliation; there is never any suggestion that the Sicilians were being fought in response to attacks upon Christians.

William clearly had an understanding of how important a politically correct portrayal of the Sicilian campaigns would be to a contemporary audience at the time of the First Crusade, declaring of Roger's efforts that

None of the brothers of that man, howsoever distinguished, entered into  
as noble a war. For against the Sicilians he always fought the enemies of

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<sup>20</sup> *Pisces fama refert a littore non procul esse  
Fluctibus Adriacis horrendo corpore magnum,  
Forma incredibili.* WA, III, lines 167 - 183, pages 172 - 174.

the name divine, desiring everyone to worship in the holy faith in which we live.<sup>21</sup>

Kenneth Wolf noted that “even William recognized that fighting Muslims meant something different to fighting Christians”<sup>22</sup> and it is in this context that we should consider the *Gesta*’s descriptions of the Sicilians as an “evil race” (*perversa gens*)<sup>23</sup> and a perfidious people (*perfida gens*).<sup>24</sup>

It would be easy therefore to place William’s account alongside many others which stereotype Muslims, but what Wolf has failed to notice is the shallowness of this slanderous depiction. The Sicilians are not portrayed as cowards; when routed they flee in terror as do the Greeks, Italians and even the Normans,<sup>25</sup> but William took pains to point out that at Palermo

the Sicilians appeared at the gates; not to stand to be slaughtered, but to go out through the portals. They defended themselves with bold spirit.<sup>26</sup>

Eventually the Sicilians were forced to flee, but they were brave enough to continue the fight by seeking help from the Africans and making a fresh offensive against their attackers at sea.<sup>27</sup> Obviously the siege of Palermo was difficult, and more importantly the

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<sup>21</sup>...nullus de fratribus eius  
Quamlibet egregius iniit tam nobile bellum.  
Nam contra Siculos divini nominis hostes  
Semper pugnavit, sanctam qua vivimus omnes  
Exaltare fidem cupiens.’ WA, III, lines 197 - 201, page 174.

<sup>22</sup>Wolf, page 125.

<sup>23</sup>WA, III, line 270, page 178.

<sup>24</sup>WA, III, line 240, page 176.

<sup>25</sup>See below.

<sup>26</sup>Procedunt portis Siculi, non stare ferentes,  
Egressique foras audaci mente repugnant.’ WA, III, lines 215 - 216, page 176.

<sup>27</sup>WA, III, line 225 - 254, pages 176 - 178.

requirements of epic narrative meant that it must be demonstrated to be so, but through their tenacity the people of Palermo, like the citizens of Bari, would seem to be far more highly rated than the Greeks. Compared to that people, whose faults William details extensively, there are no stereotypical characteristics given to justify the harsh terms that the *Gesta* employs. The Sicilians fought bravely on several occasions, flee when overcome, and capitulate humbly - it may be significant that William's narrative makes no mention of atrocious Muslim practices in battle.

William's only reference to the Islamic faith was Robert Guiscard's assertion that the city was "subjected to demons" (*subdita daemonibus*)<sup>28</sup> and his own recollection that

where before a Mosque had been situated, he built a Church of the Virgin Mother; and where the throne of Mohammed and the demon had been, was the throne of God.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, like many mediaeval Christians, he had fallen prey to the common misconception that Islam was a polytheist religion. In contrast to the 1038 campaign of Maniaces (and later Docianus) against the Sicilians "who had not stopped laying waste to the coasts of Calabria"<sup>30</sup> the justification for the protracted war of Robert and Roger rested not upon retaliation for heinous deeds committed against Christians either in Sicily or on the mainland, but because Roger desired "everyone to worship in the holy faith in which we live." This is the key to William's account of the conquest of Sicily: in the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* its *raison d'être* centres not upon its importance for increasing control of

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<sup>28</sup>WA, III, line 287, page 178.

<sup>29</sup>'...et qua muscheta solebat

*Esse prius, matris fabricavit Virginis aulam;*

*Et quae Machamati fuerat cum daemone sedes,*

*Sedes facta Dei, fit dignis ianua coeli.'* WA, III, lines 333 - 336, page 182.

<sup>30</sup>'*Qui fines Calabros non cessant depopulari.'* WA, I, line 198, page 108.

Mediterranean shipping, stamping out piracy and protecting trade; nor on the material wealth of the island; but solely on reclaiming it as a Christian governed territory.

William's language throughout this part of his poem may simply have been influenced by the contemporary fervour for Crusade that his Cluniac patron had stirred in western Europe, but it is probable that there was a deeper purpose beneath his characterisation. Robert's men were described as 'the Christians' (*Christicolae*),<sup>31</sup> 'worshippers of Christ' (*Cultores Christi*),<sup>32</sup> and 'the crowd of the faithful' (*turba fidelis*)<sup>33</sup> who were strengthened by having taken the 'body of Christ' with the blood before battle,<sup>34</sup> seeking only the aid of the 'eternal Prince by whose flesh they had been restored' while combating an evil and perfidious people.<sup>35</sup> The *Gesta* thus presents a very strong sense of 'them' and 'us', but William's 'us' is no longer confined to a mere people but to a faith. When Robert Guiscard rallied his men before an assault on Palermo these words were put into his mouth:

This city is an enemy to God, the honouring of the divine is unknown, it is subjected to demons, deprived of its vigour of antiquity; now it shakes as if it were broken... ...It is hard to capture, but through the compassion of Christ it will be opened. Trust in his leadership, impose an end to the battles and let us hasten together to storm the city.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>WA, III, line 242, page 176; line 254, page 178.

<sup>32</sup>WA, III, line 218, page 176.

<sup>33</sup>WA, III, line 238, page 176.

<sup>34</sup>WA, III, lines 235 - 237, page 176.

<sup>35</sup>WA, III, lines 194 - 339, pages 174 - 182.

<sup>36</sup>*Urbs inimica Deo, divini nescia cultus,  
Subdita daemonibus, veteri spoliata vigore,  
Iam quasi fracta tremit. Si vos instare potenter  
Viderit, obstandi nullos meditabitur ausus;  
At si deficitis, cras viribus haec reparatis  
Acrius obstabit. Dum tempus adesse videtis,  
Currite! dura capi, Christo miserante, patebit.  
Difficilem quemvis faciem facit ipse laborem.  
Hoc duce confisi, bellis imponite finem,  
Atque invadendam cuncti properemus ad urbem.* WA, III, lines 286 - 295, pages 178 - 180.



William's account seems too strong in its emphases to be merely influenced by the Crusading fervour at the time, instead it seems to be carefully written to promote Crusading - stressing that this was the most noble type of war. William mentioned at the onset of his work that Urban II had been pressing him for a speedy completion of his poem, but why was the Pope so concerned that the work be finished? While the work certainly promoted papal authority, is it not possible that Urban had another purpose in commissioning the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* - a Crusading purpose? The *Gesta*, as an epic poem celebrating military exploits was most likely designed to be heard by an aristocratic military audience - an ideal vehicle to sway through tales of conquest those emotions that a more orthodox sermon may not have reached.<sup>37</sup> This more likely than not was the reason that William condensed the long and difficult conquest of Sicily from a campaign into a short and fruitful Crusade, intent upon encouraging the west to follow in the footsteps of this divinely ordained successful enterprise. While Urban was certainly interested in increasing stability in southern Italy, by the time this work would have been commissioned (and by the time Urban made his plea for haste) there was no pressing requirement for a poem promoting the Hautevilles or the reform papacy. If we consider Urban's desire for military men to go on Crusade there may have been pressing need for a

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<sup>37</sup>Colin Morris, in his study of the *Gesta Francorum*, suggested that the common vernacular was not so dissimilar from Latin at this point in time. C. Morris, 'The *Gesta Francorum* as Narrative History' in *Reading Medieval Studies*, Volume XIX (University of Reading, 1993), pages 55 - 71. While the Latin of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* is considerably more complex than that of the crusading account, it is not inconceivable that the aristocracy, who would have been able to follow and understand the Latin rites of the Church, would have been more than able to understand an oral performance, which the meter of the verse and pace and narrative devices of the story suggest as its intended medium. It is easy to underestimate the understanding of Latin in the mediaeval world: being able to read or write Latin is not the same as being able to understand or speak it. Many people would have been able to understand William of Apulia's Latin even if they could not read it. In 2000 a report by the National Skills Task Force found that 7 million people in the United Kingdom were functionally illiterate. These figures were supported the following year in a study by the University of Ulster which showed that up to 15 per cent of people aged 15 to 21 were functionally illiterate. With the exception perhaps of a very small percentage of this number (who might be recent immigrants for example), all of these individuals would be able to converse in English even if they could not read or write it (and for some it might be their second, third or even fourth language). Why then should we apply different standards to mediaeval audiences and Latin?

work that stressed the close and dutiful relationship between the Normans in the South and the Papacy, an example of obedience and Crusading fervour and success that might prove inspirational to both men in the South and their northern cousins. Urban's desire for haste would strongly suggest that his role in the commissioning of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* was his wish to encourage men to go on Crusade. The strongest evidence that William intended the Sicilian campaign and the First Crusade to be linked in the minds of his audience is that his account of the conquest of Sicily follows on from his description of the rising of the Persians in the East in the aftermath of the Battle of Mantzikert with only the briefest of intermissions.<sup>38</sup>

Terms used to describe the Sicilians				
<i>Term</i>	<i>Frequency</i>			<i>Total</i>
	Book I	Book III	Book V	
<i>Siculi</i>	3	8		11
<i>Gens Agarena</i>		2	1	2
<i>Panormenses</i>		2		2
<i>Gentiles</i>		1		1

<sup>38</sup>Having devoted 93 lines of verse to the siege of Bari in Book II, William wrapped up the end of the siege in 51 lines. William wanted to stress that the force which took Sicily consisted of Normans, Calabrians, Baresi and Greeks (as an example of traditionally opposed peoples joining together as Christians against a common enemy) and thus had to relate the fall of Bari before the fall of Palermo. As the final stages of that siege involved aid sent by Michael VII Ducas he had to relate Romanus' fall beforehand. In my opinion the First Crusade was the sole reason for the incorporation of the Battle of Mantzikert into the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*. William's characterisation of the Seljuqs and his account of Mantzikert and its relevance to the Crusade is discussed below.

Aside from the references listed in the First and Fourth Books (which refer to the campaigns of the Greek army in 1038 and the peoples who had feared Robert Guiscard respectively) all the terms given above relate to the siege and conquest of Palermo. As can be seen above the term *Siculi* is, unsurprisingly enough, the most favoured term applied, but interestingly the *Gesta* also uses the ethnic term *Gens Agarena*, identifying Robert's opponents as Arabs. It is interesting to note that William, in a description of the trading city of Amalfi, distinguishes the Arabs, Libyans, Sicilians and Africans as separate peoples thus showing that it is easy to be too casual (particularly where Sicily is concerned) in ascribing racial terms.<sup>39</sup> The use of *Gens Agarena* in Book Five has been shaded and excluded from the totals as it is not possible to ascertain whether the reference, hailing from his description of the terror that gripped Robert's men upon his death, is to the Sicilians or merely to Arabic peoples in general, especially since William had previously drawn a line between the two.<sup>40</sup> The single use of *Gentiles* denotes Robert's perception of the Palermitans as pagans.

The Sicilian Muslims were described in the *Gesta* with the very barest of the trappings of crusading literature, with (unusually for William) no justification given for some of the more caustic names given above - in contrast to the other peoples in the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* the little condemnation they are given rests solely on their religion rather than on any cultural traits. This barrenness, combined with William's description of the worship of Mohammed and the devil in the mosque at Palermo, suggests not only that his depiction of the Sicilians may have been curtailed partly because he wanted to concentrate on the Sicilians as pagans rather than as a people but also because any Southern Italian audience may have had the familiarity, based upon trading links, to

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<sup>39</sup>WA, III, line 483, page 190.

<sup>40</sup>WA, V, line 368, page 256.

recognise a more outrageous portrayal as false.<sup>41</sup> A more humane or rounded portrayal of the Sicilians and their cultural traits would not have been in keeping with the Crusading rhetoric that was the core of his account of the final stages of the Sicilian campaign. This straitened portrayal certainly served no real purpose in promoting Hauteville authority in the south and so its most likely source is to be found in the requirements made of William by his other patron, Urban II.

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<sup>41</sup>The theories advanced in Chapter One suggest that Roger Borsa certainly had a southern Italian audience in mind for the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, but the geographical location of the eldest surviving copies show that it was disseminated further north as well. As Chapter V shows, both Suger of St Denis and Robert of Torigni in the North had some exposure to the *Gesta*, and in the East Anna Comnena had certainly seen the last two books (either in the original or translated into Greek, possibly by her husband Nicephorus Bryennius).

## The Seljuqs

The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*'s only references to the Seljuqs revolve around the unfortunate campaign of the Byzantine Emperor Romanus IV Diogenes at Mantzikert and Alexius I Comnenus' use of them in his Balkan campaign against the invading southern Italian army under the command of Robert Guiscard's son Boamund. As with William's characterisation of the Sicilians at Palermo both accounts are predominantly battle orientated, thus limiting the scope for an in depth portrayal of the race, but remaining revealing none the less.

William introduced his audience to the Seljuq people by relating how, under the inept rulership of the youths Michael (later Michael VII Ducas) and Constantine,

The terrified Christian population, who used to cultivate the fertile lands of the Roman Empire, fled from the Turks who had emerged from the eastern regions. The greatest part of those men fell with violence - slain by the abominable swords of the Turks, and in the captured cities all the people yielded; giving tribute they served those men.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Horum temporibus Turchos orientis ab oris  
Egressos fugit gens territa cristicolarum,  
Qui Romaniae loca deliciosa colebant.  
Maxima pars horum ruit interfecta nefandis  
Turchorum gladiis, et captis urbibus omnis  
Subditus his populus dans vectigalia servit.* WA, III, lines 7 - 12, page 164.

The Seljuqs, predominantly described as *Persae* (see below), were subsequently described as “ravaging the unhappy Greeks,”<sup>43</sup> but it is significant that initially William described the fate not of ‘the terrified people who tilled the delicious lands of the Roman empire’ but of “the terrified people of the Christians,” who were forced to yield and give tribute. William’s deliberate distinction of the conquered people as Christians served several purposes: in a crusading climate it related his narrative to contemporary worries; ensured interest in events which might at that point in the narrative seem peripheral (particularly to any non-Italian audiences); and itself was designed to refresh lay interest in crusading. One might expect that in these conditions William might have chosen to vilify the Seljuqs, but this is not the case. It might be argued that William does not do this because they are fighting Greeks, who after all would seem to be the villains of his work, the epic foil for the courageous Normans, but such an argument cannot hold water for in this instance neither side was slandered by the author.

Rather than use the Battle of Mantzikert to pour further scorn on the fighting abilities of the Greeks or to vilify the Seljuqs, the *Gesta* presents a very even handed account, showing a very accurate knowledge of the Seljuq tactics that crusading contemporaries would experience. The Seljuqs were described as circling Romanus’ men and showering them with “a hail storm of arrows.”<sup>44</sup> The Seljuqs themselves, as Romanus himself correctly surmised, were motivated more by a desire to plunder than a desire to slaughter (a truthful perception that perhaps a more propagandist author might have chosen to distort) and allowed many of the fleeing Greeks to escape.<sup>45</sup> William did not portray the Seljuqs as uncivilised barbarians but stressed that the Sultan Alp Arslan was an honourable man who treated his defeated foe deferentially, negotiating a treaty

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<sup>43</sup>WA, III, line 20, page 164.

<sup>44</sup>WA, III, lines 43 - 46, page 166.

<sup>45</sup>WA, III, lines 48 - 49, page 166.

with Romanus and escorting him with honour to his own lands.<sup>46</sup> The *Gesta*'s tone remains respectful, particularly with reference to Alp Arslan and here a parallel can be drawn with William's contemporary, the anonymous author of the *Gesta Francorum* who noted

What man, however experienced and learned, would dare write of the skill and prowess and courage of the Turks, who thought that they would strike terror into the Franks, as they had done into the Arabs and Saracens, Armenians, Syrians and Greeks, by the menace of their arrows? ...They have a saying that they are of common stock with the Franks, and that no men, except the Franks and themselves, are naturally born to be knights. ...you could not find stronger or braver or more skilful soldiers.<sup>47</sup>

Following his account of Romanus' meeting with the Seljuq Sultan and his subsequent deposition by the Ducas family, William then revealed what was probably the central reason for this eastern digression in his poem:

From that time the perfidious people of the Persians began to rise up against the Roman Empire in slaughter and pillage. It would not have been returned thus far subject to the laws of the empire unless the people of the Gauls, more powerful in the strengths of arms than every people, spurred on by celestial command were restoring it to freedom, having subdued that land from the enemy. These men were moved by God's

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<sup>46</sup>WA, III, lines 50 - 72, pages 166 - 168.

<sup>47</sup>GF, III, page 21.



design to open the holy roads of the Sepulchre now closed for a long time.

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It is clear from this passage that the purpose behind William's inclusion of an account of the Battle of Mantzikert was to draw his audience's attention to the plight of the east. As Michele Fuiano has noted, his use of the imperfect subjunctive while describing the Gallic campaign suggests that it was an ongoing and uncompleted action while he was writing.<sup>49</sup> The *Gesta* would certainly have mentioned the conquest of Jerusalem at this point in his poem had it been achieved. While the Battle of Mantzikert and the predominantly eastern orientation of Romanus' policies affected southern Italian politics, most notably perhaps the fate of Bari, William does not suggest that the fall of Bari was in any way related to the problems of the Byzantine Empire in the east. While the broader modern view of southern Italian history can show a connection between the two events, this would probably not have been immediately obvious to an audience in the 1090's. Since William made no effort to show that an account of a battle in Anatolia in 1071 had any real place or relevance to his poem its inclusion would seem to hinge upon the above passage. William digressed from his account of the siege of Bari to draw attention to the contemporary event of Mantzikert which allowed him to both explain the reason for the First Crusade and remind his audience of it, further expanding on this by couching his subsequent account of the conquest of Sicily in strong crusading rhetoric.

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<sup>48</sup>*Tempore Persarum gens perfida coepit ab illo  
In Romaniam consurgere caede, rapinis.  
Imperii nec adhuc redigi sub iura valeret,  
Gens nisi Gallorum, quae gente potentior omni  
Viribus armorum, nutu stimulata superno,  
Hanc libertati superato redderet hoste,  
Quae spirante Deo sanctas aperire Sepulcri*

*Est animata vias longo iam tempore clausas.*' WA, III, lines 98 - 105, pages 168 - 170.

<sup>49</sup>M. Fuiano, 'Guglielmo di Puglia, storico di Roberto il Guiscardo', in *Archivio Storico per le province napoletane*, LXXX (Nuova Serie, XXXII), 1950 - 51, page 22.

The evaluation above of William's essentially neutral portrayal of the Seljuqs is corroborated by his subsequent references to the Emperor Alexius I Comnenus' employment of them, first in his coup against Nicephorus Botaneiates and later against the armies of Boamund. William recorded that the "fierce Persians", who were brought to Constantinople by Alexius so that "he might be feared more", "were not afraid to violate the holy places with their impious hands." This was not wanton destruction though since Alexius "had given the city to the invaders to be pillaged for three days."<sup>50</sup> Alexius was not even condemned for his actions, and is even referred to in the following sentence as a "pleasant man."<sup>51</sup> The Byzantine Emperor later employed Seljuq allies against Boamund's men, where they were noted for their use of arrows and flight from the massed force of a Norman cavalry charge.<sup>52</sup> In many respects they are an invisible people; their use by Alexius is not mentioned as condemnation against him and they are not distinguished by a major role in Alexius' campaign, their presence is recorded simply because they were there.<sup>53</sup>

From these references made by William it is possible to see two particular characteristics of the Seljuqs. The first and perhaps most evident from both his accounts of Mantzikert and Dyrrakhion is that the Seljuqs were perceived as archers. The

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<sup>50</sup>*Depraedanda tribus datur Urbs invasa diebus  
Dux quibus extiterat; manibus quoque sancta nefandis  
Atroces Persae loca non violare verentur.  
Ducit Alexius hos, magis ut timeatur, ad Urbem.* WA, IV, lines 150 - 153, page 212.

<sup>51</sup>WA, IV, line 155, page 212.

<sup>52</sup>*...Cum pars iam multa fuisset  
Saucia Turchorum, quos duxerat ille, sagittis,  
Marte mori potius, quam cedere turpiter Argis  
Unanimes statuunt, et convertuntur in hostes,  
Gente coartata, quo praevaluere paratu.  
Turchi terrentur conversis hostibus, illos  
Acriter obniti graviterque ferire videntes.* WA, IV, lines 331- 337, page 222.

<sup>53</sup>While William often glosses over events his attention to detail in military matters is considerable and he can usually be relied on to give an extremely accurate picture. His otherwise insignificant inclusion of the Seljuqs in the Byzantine army is another example of such precision. This accuracy obviously depended upon good sources, but it may also have been a requirement for a poem aimed at an audience with considerable experience of military matters.

Normans were renowned for their horsemanship, the Germans for their long swords, and the Seljuqs for their skill with the bow. The second observable characteristic of the race was their hunger for plunder. Hence at Mantzikert the Seljuqs “regarded with longing the camp of the emperor which they needed to capture” and Romanus, recognising and anticipating this greed,

ordered that whatever money there was in the camp and all the valuable clothes and all dishes of gold or silver, should be carried in order to be bestrewn in the camp; so that if the camp was seized to be violated by the Turks, having seen these things they would desist from attacking the Greeks.<sup>54</sup>

and “more intent upon plunder than slaying soldiers the Persians allowed many to escape.”<sup>55</sup> That this hunger for wealth was an innate characteristic of the race seems to be supported by William’s observation that when Alexius’ Seljuq allies pillaged Constantinople for three days they even sacked the Churches.<sup>56</sup> The innate avarice of the Turks suggested by William is echoed by one of the versions of Urban II’s sermon at Clermont proclaiming the First Crusade. Guibert of Nogent’s account of Urban’s speech describes the taxation levied on pilgrims to the Holy Sepulchre by the Turks and the

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<sup>54</sup>*“Praecipit ut quicquid castris inerat solidorum, Omnis vestitus pretiosus, et omnia vasa Auri aut argenti, castris spargenda ferantur: Ut si contigerit Turchis irrumpere castra, Horum prospectu desistant laedere Graecos.”* WA, III, lines 36 - 40, page 166.

<sup>55</sup>*“Sed plures praedae quam militibus feriendis Intenti Persae faciunt evadere multos.”* WA, III, lines 48 - 49, page 166.

<sup>56</sup>The Seljuq behaviour at Mantzikert and Romanus’ anticipation of it is far more telling than their ‘licensed’ sacking of Constantinople since any army would expect to gain from the conquest of a major city. William’s remarks about Church plate are more likely to stem from indignation of such violation as a monk rather than drawing comparison between Christians and Infidels. Later Crusaders, such as the men of the Fourth Crusade, had no reservations about handling Byzantine Church plate.

battery, torture and murders comitted upon those who claimed to have no wealth with which to buy passage.<sup>57</sup>

Terms used to describe the Seljuqs				
<i>Term</i>	<i>Frequency</i>			<i>Total</i>
	Book III	Book IV	Book V	
<i>Turchi</i>	4	3	1	8
<i>Persae</i>	11	1	1	13
<i>Barbarica gens</i>		1		1

As can be seen William preferred the use of *Persae* over *Turchi* when describing the Seljuq people. These two terms are interchangeable, but William does make a definite distinction between these and the Armenians (*Armenii*), and between Seljuqs and Arabs.<sup>58</sup> William used the term *Barbarica gens* to describe a large portion of Alexius' army at the battle of Dyrrakhion, he subsequently referred only to Greeks and Seljuqs, suggesting that he may have been referring to Seljuqs earlier, but as this is not entirely certain I have shaded this usage. It may be that William was describing a group of allies from outside Imperial borders (of which the Seljuqs were but a part). *Barbarica gens*, like *Persae*, has classical overtones, and William's predominant choice of these terms as opposed to the more accurate *Turchi* reflect the imitation of the educated style of Vergil that he chose for the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*.

<sup>57</sup>Guibert of Nogent, *Historia quae dicitur Gesta Dei per Francos*, in Krey, A.C., *The First Crusade: The accounts of Eye-Witnesses and Participants* (Princeton, 1921), pages 36 - 40.

<sup>58</sup>WA, V, lines 367- 371, page 256.

## The Greeks

If there is any racial group that rivals the Normans for a leading part in the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* it is the Greeks, but there are no illusions as to the role in which they are cast. The opening lines of the first book set the tone for the forthcoming tale:

After it became pleasing to the powerful King to change the epochs and the kingdoms, so that the region of Apulia, possessed by the Greeks for a long time, should now no longer be inhabited by them, the people of the Normans that is noted for its rough knights entered, and through driving out the Greeks ruled the Latin territory.<sup>59</sup>

Thus from the very beginning of his poem William established that the Greeks were a people who had lost God's favour and exercised no restraint in lavishing insults upon them. The most common theme to these insults was the perceived effeminacy of the Greeks - the Lombard Arduin protested at Michael Docianus' distribution of booty following the Sicilian campaign of 1038 since "the idle throng had been given payment which should have been given to men, since a Greek is like a woman."<sup>60</sup> This trait would

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<sup>59</sup>*Postquam complacuit regi mutare potenti  
Tempora cum regnis, ut Graecis Apula tellus  
Iam possessa diu non amplius incoletur,  
Gens Normannorum feritate insignis equestri  
Intrat, et expulsis Latio dominatur Achivis.* WA, I, lines 1 - 5, page 98.

<sup>60</sup>*Convenit inde suos iratus et arguit Argos  
Turpis avaritiae, populo quia dantur inert  
Munera danda viris, cum sit quasi femina Graecus.* WA, I, lines 210 - 212, page 110.

seem to have been a common perception amongst those of Apulian background: William's anonymous crusading contemporary attributed to Kerbogah, the Atabeg of Mosul, this angry reply to the Crusading emissaries at Antioch:

We have come here because we are scandalised to think that those leaders and commanders whom you name should lay claim to the land which we have conquered from an effeminate people.<sup>61</sup>

Effeminacy was not the only vice particular to the Greeks and in an effective assassination of their racial character Arduin reported to his Norman allies that

that race was cowardly; for it was a companion of excessive wine drinking loosened into drunkenness - often they would flee from the slightest enemy. He declared them cumbersome in dress and not suited for battles.

62

It is not difficult to find evidence supporting all these allegations within the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*. The cowardice and readiness to flee of the Greek people would seem to be as much an inherent a part of their nature as courage and impetuosity was to the Normans. The Greeks under the leadership of Tornicius in the summer of 1017 met the Normans in battle and fled, and thus the Normans learnt "from experience that Greek men were not robust; those men were not brave but better acquainted with flight."<sup>63</sup> The

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<sup>61</sup>GF, IX, page 67.

<sup>62</sup>'Cum genus ignavum sit, quod comes ebrietatis  
Crapula dissolvat, minimo saepe hoste fugatos  
Vestituque graves, non armis asserit aptos.' WA, I, lines 226 - 228, page 110.

<sup>63</sup>'Normannis auget validas victoria vires,  
Expertis Graecos nullius roboris esse,  
Quos non audaces sed cognovere fugaces.' WA, I, lines 77 - 79, page 102.

Greeks proceeded to flee under the leadership of Michael Docianus<sup>64</sup> and Exaugustus,<sup>65</sup> and cower behind the city walls and refuse to sally forth under the leadership of Maniaces<sup>66</sup> and later under the command of Alexius I Comnenus who “had been overcome so many times he dared not stray far.”<sup>67</sup> These conflicts do tend to fall into a pattern, perhaps most accurately summed up by the occasion of the two Greek nobles Adrian Comnenus and Nicephorus Melissenus leading a large army against Boamund:

The Normans, mindful of their usual courage rushed swiftly to arms, and the Greeks, accustomed to escape with fleet feet, returned hastily to the walls of the city of Larissa.<sup>68</sup>

It was the companionship of excessive wine drinking that proved the downfall of the men of the Greek general Basilacius, who celebrated the apparent flight of Alexius Comnenus, only to discover that for once his flight was subterfuge. Basilacius’ army was unable to resist Alexius’ men, for

sleep and the overindulgence of wine made them sluggish and they were unable either to run away or return to arms.<sup>69</sup>

The reasoning behind the costume of the Greeks being considered cumbersome is, by curious twist of fate, illustrated most clearly when William related the meeting of the

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<sup>64</sup>WA, I, lines 276 - 289, page 114; *Ibid.*, Book I, lines 297 - 312, pages 114 - 116.

<sup>65</sup>WA, I, lines 376 - 395, pages 118 - 120.

<sup>66</sup>WA, I, lines 543 - 553, page 128.

<sup>67</sup>*Non procul audebant totiens superatus abire.* WA, V, line 69, page 240.

<sup>68</sup>*Normanni solitae memores virtutis ad arma  
Concurrunt celeres; solitique fugacibus Argi  
Elabi pedibus, redeunt properanter ad urbis  
Moenia Larissae...* WA, V, lines 65 - 68, pages 238 - 240.

<sup>69</sup>*His sopor et vini dederat violentia multa  
Segnitiam; nec abire valent nec ad arma reverti.* WA, IV, lines 115 - 116, page 210.



Lombard Melo with a group of Normans at Mount Gargano.<sup>70</sup> Melo, who was a political fugitive at the time, was described as being clothed “in the fashion of the Greeks” and the Normans marvelled at such unfamiliar dress and that “the unfamiliar wheelings of a turban were present on his bound head.”<sup>71</sup> The term William used for Turban is *mitrae*, which in the classical Latin with which William was undoubtedly well versed, was a word associated with the costume of women or effeminate men. This indicates that Greek costume was deemed cumbersome by the Normans because of its effeminacy.

While it is probably ethnically accurate, William’s use of the term ‘Greek’ would have been construed as an insult by an empire that thought of itself as Roman. The insult was a common one, but very pertinent as William deliberately modelled his tale on the

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<sup>70</sup>Einar Joranson dismissed the validity of the Gargano tradition of the inception of the Normans’ career in Southern Italy on the grounds that “a man of Melo’s sagacity, and with his political aspirations, would hardly have permitted his desire to visit Monte Gargano - assuming that he really felt such a desire - to wax so strong as to induce capture by the Byzantines, who had already sent his wife and son to Constantinople as prisoners. And even in case he could have entered with perfect security upon a journey to and from Monte Gargano, the probability is that he would not have made the pious excursion at the time in question (c. 1015 - 1016); for we are reliably informed that Melo’s entire effort, throughout the period of his exile, was devoted unremittingly to finding means of overthrowing the Greek domination in Apulia.” In imagining that Melo’s ability to move around was so limited (especially considering that tradition holds that he was disguised in Greek dress), Joranson seems to envisage Apulia as being under constant surveillance in much the same way as the West portrayed the U.S.S.R as being by its security services during the cold war - a technological and cultural impossibility in the eleventh century. While outside military aid would have been essential in any uprising against Byzantine authority, the support of the local aristocracy and towns was even more essential, and most likely could only have been assured by personal meetings. Therefore the most likely place for Melo to be spending the predominant amount of his time would have been Apulia. It is not improbable that a group of Normans may have made a deliberate pilgrimage to Monte Gargano as William would have us believe, alternatively it might have been a natural place for Normans to visit on a return journey from the east - not an unusual occurrence in an age when the Byzantine Empire employed many men of Northern European extraction. I do not believe that Joranson’s argument against the validity of the event is a strong one. E. Joranson, “The Inception of the career of the Normans in Italy - legend and history”, in *Speculum XXIII* (1948), page 368. More recently John France reviewed the various traditions in the light of more recent work on Glaber and papal history and concluded that while we cannot say with any certainty that the Gargano tradition is anything more than a myth, the evidence suggests that Melo’s revolt of 1017 was the occasion of the coming of the Normans to southern Italy. J. France, ‘The occasion of the coming of the Normans to southern Italy’ in *Journal of Medieval History* 17 (Amsterdam, 1991), pages 185 - 205.

<sup>71</sup>*‘Horum nonnulli Gargani culmina montis  
Conscendere, tibi, Michael archangele, voti  
Debita solventes. Ibi quendam conspicientes  
More virum Graeco vestitum, nomine Melum,  
Exulis ignotam vestem capitique ligato  
Insolitos mitrae mirantur adesse rotatus.’* WA, I, lines 11 - 16, pages 98 - 100.

*Aeneid* - the story of the foundation of Rome by the survivors of the Greek sack of Troy. When the general Exaugustus rallied his Greek troops it is significant that he was made to hearken back to Greek forefathers rather than the heroes of ancient Rome, and it is surely no accident that his speech referred to the fall of Troy. The classical feel of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardii* is often evoked through the number of names that William employs when he wishes to describe the Greeks, as illustrated by the table below.

Terms used to describe the Greeks						
Term	Frequency					Total
	Book I	Book II	Book III	Book IV	Book V	
<b>Graeci</b>	29	2	4	3	7	45
<b>Danai</b>	12		6	2	6	26
<b>Argi</b>	4	2	5	2	3	16
<b>Pelasgi</b>	6			1	3	10
<b>Achivi</b>	3			1		4
<b>Argolici</b>	2			1	1	4
<b>Gens Argiva</b>	1					1
<b>Gens Achaea</b>	1					1
<b>Michaeni</b>	1					1
<b>Gens [terrata] Cristocolarum</b>			1			1

Exercitus Imperialis				1		1
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As is evident from the table above, and as contemporary language would suggest, *Graeci* was William's most favoured term for the Greeks, though he maintains a classical feel to the work by employing a large number of terms with classical resonances such as *Danai*, *Argi*, *Pelagii*, *Achivi*, *Argolici*, *Gens Argiva* and *Gens Achaea*. While these peter out as the work progresses, the continued use of *Danai* throughout the text and the revival of the rich variety of language in Books Four and Five ensure that a sense of the epic nature of Robert's deeds never departs entirely. While *Graeci* was the most popular term overall, it can be seen that in each book of the *Gesta* its usage is exceeded by the combined number of alternative terms. The term *Achivi* is used by William four times: in the first instance it is in the context that it is God's will that the Greeks should lose Apulia; in the second it referred to their suffering their most serious defeat in battle yet; and in the third the Greeks hide behind the walls of Taranto, afraid to meet the challenge of William Iron Arm.<sup>72</sup> The term *Achivi* is linked with Cicero's saying "*quid quid delirant reges plecentur Achivi*" (whatever wrongs the (Greek) Kings are guilty of (before Troy) their subjects must suffer for).<sup>73</sup> As William employed this term from among the others in his formidable arsenal whenever he wished to show the Greeks about to get their due, it is possible (though not certain) that he had this phrase in mind. He may therefore be showing the Greek expulsion from Italy as a direct consequence of their actions at Troy, and asserting the position of the Normans, brought by the north wind to seek the borders of the Latins,<sup>74</sup> as the rightful heirs of Aeneas (similarly carried to the shores of Latium by the

<sup>72</sup>The fourth use of this term is perhaps more ambiguous. It is again linked with people getting just deserts for their actions, but in this instance it is the deserters from Robert Guiscard's army who receive their due punishment at the hands of the Greeks rather than the Greeks themselves who are suffering. WA, IV, lines 444 -448, page 228.

<sup>73</sup>C.T. Lewis & C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 1879), page 22.

<sup>74</sup>WA, I, lines 6 -8, page 98.

wind) on the peninsula. The term *Michaeni* is shaded as it refers to the Greeks (or rather the Greek fleet) at Troy, rather than the Greeks William was describing. Similarly the term *Gens Cristicolarum* is used, but while it can be said that this definitely refers to Christians in the Roman Empire, it cannot be said for certain to refer to Greeks, for William was referring to the far eastern lands of the empire.

The term empire itself was only ever used in conjunction with the political entity which we now know as the Byzantine Empire. There is no acknowledgement in the *Gesta* of any empire in the west. The term *Imperium* appears with the descriptive adjectives *Romanus* and *Sanctus*. There does not appear to be any particular pattern to William's use of these adjectives, the empire is described as *Sanctus* on four occasions, and as *Romanus* in equal amounts. The term *Imperium* stands alone more frequently. It seems difficult to find a concrete explanation for William describing the Greek empire with the qualifying adjective *Sanctus*, especially considering the rather troubled relationship between the eastern and western churches over the last half century. One possible explanation may be found in the diplomatic policy of Urban II towards the Byzantine empire which seemed to have as its aim an element of reconciliation between the two churches.<sup>75</sup> If William had been influenced by this change of tack in Papal attitude then this would perhaps explain his choice of phrases for the political and spiritual entity of the Empire, even if he could not bring himself to say anything nice about the Greeks themselves. The Greek armies are not customarily described as imperial, even if they are led in person by an emperor such as Romanus IV Diogenes or Alexius I Comnenus. The one exception to this occurs when the Emperor Alexius I Comnenus' men are described as "the Imperial army"

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<sup>75</sup>P. Charanis, 'Byzantium, the West and the origin of the First Crusade', in *Byzantion 19* (Brussels, 1949); D.M. Nicol, 'Byzantium and the Papacy in the Eleventh Century', in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History 13* (Edinburgh & London, 1962); H.E.J. Cowdrey, 'The Gregorian Papacy, Byzantium, and the First Crusade', in *Byzantinische Forschungen 13* (Amsterdam, 1988).

(*Imperialis exercitus*).<sup>76</sup> It is important to note though that this epitaph does not refer to a Greek army, but one composed of both Greeks and Turks.<sup>77</sup> Thus the Greeks and the empire were not seen as the same thing; the office and entity of the empire stood above and apart from race. In this respect the Greek people are portrayed as tools of the empire rather than the embodiment of the empire itself. Certainly when Exaugustus rallied his Greek troops it was with a stirring speech concerning their Greek forefathers (particularly those at Troy and with Alexander the Great) rather than the Roman heritage of the conquests of Caesar or Scipio.<sup>78</sup>

The table above reflects the significance of the Greeks throughout the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*. In the first book they were the most dominant force on the southern peninsula, and this is reflected by the frequency with which they are referred to by William. Thereafter, as can be seen by the reduction of in the number of references to them from 58 to 4, their direct influence declined in favour of a more distant political role. In addition to this William took pains to show the internal dissent and corruption of the empire by relating the political upheavals around the imperial throne, contrasting their squabbles with the unity of the de Hauteville family. The frequency of references to the Greeks in Book Three only rises because William chose to relate the sorry fate of Romanus IV Diogenes, a device which both allowed him to show the broader tapestry upon which his history is woven, and more importantly enabled him to make reference to the popular First Crusade which would certainly have gripped the imaginations of his

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<sup>76</sup>WA, IV, line 389, page 224.

<sup>77</sup>While the presence of the Turks is emphasised, William first writes of Alexius that "He led innumerable companies from various peoples; a great number of the barbarian people with a multitude of the Greeks attended that man." While the Turks indubitably made up the greater part of these barbarians, it is not unlikely that other 'non Greek' peoples were present, thus rendering the general epitaph 'imperial army' more appropriate. '*Innumeras ducit varia de gente catervas. Maxima barbaricae cum Graecis copia gentis*

*Hunc comitabatur.*' WA, IV, lines 322 - 324, page 222.

<sup>78</sup>WA, I, lines 350 - 372, page 118.

audience.<sup>79</sup> Without this intrusion into the narrative the third book would have had even fewer Greek references than Book Two, reflecting still further how much the physical realities of the peninsula had changed. The resurgence in both the number and linguistic breadth of references to the Greeks in the fourth and fifth books reflects the revival of the Greek role as the enemies of the Normans, and thus once again William employed language with appropriately classical resonances to his subject matter.<sup>80</sup> The epic theme is constant throughout the text, but it is orientated predominantly to the struggle between the Greeks and the Normans, and thus we cannot expect to find this in Book Three, which tells three different stories: the history behind the Seljuq occupation of the Anatolian plain, the religiously motivated Christian conquest of Sicily and the rise of Robert Guiscard to pre-eminence amongst the Normans of Southern Italy.

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<sup>79</sup>Thus this particular digression into the political history of the Byzantine Empire is not, as Kenneth Wolf suggests, an event which does not impinge directly upon the Normans. Apart from the fact that it very cleverly allows William to make a valid reference to the First Crusade, in which the nobles of Southern Italy (predominantly under the leadership of Roger Borsa's step brother Boamund) played an essential role, it explains the accession of the weak Michael VII Ducas, whose deposition is central to the events of Books Four and Five. Wolf, page 133.

<sup>80</sup>This aspect of the text has been missed by Wolf, perhaps due to his concentration on the Normans.



## The 'Native' Italians

It is interesting that William volunteered very little information on the 'native' peoples of Italy, but what he did say was very rarely complimentary. It is in his account of Civitate that he vented particular spite on the Italians in general and in particular the people of the Marches and the Lombards. The extent of this criticism was missed by Kenneth Wolf who believed that "William was one of the very few commentators on the Battle of Civitate who did not fault the Italians as a people for the defeat of Leo's forces... William's criticism was directed more specifically at the people of the March"<sup>81</sup> whom he described as "the most unworthy dregs of the people of Italy, regarded as worthy reprobates by those upright Latins." To the people of the Marches "alarm and flight and riotous living was natural."<sup>82</sup> Wolf probably based his upbeat assessment of William's description of the Italians in general upon his comment that "many of the Italians overflowed with great courage"<sup>83</sup> but having described the vast range of Italian peoples present at the battle, William went on to say that "all the Italians pressed together... for they did not know how to arrange their battle lines in proper order in the conflict of battle" and it was these men who fled like pigeons from hawks upon the first charge of Richard of Aversa. Thus William could state that "many of the people of Latium fell in battle there, but the greater part fled."<sup>84</sup> As it was the flight of these men that exposed the

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<sup>81</sup>Wolf, pages 126 - 127.

<sup>82</sup>*Spem dabit his Italiae fex indignissima gentis  
Gens Marchana, probis digne reprobata Latinis:  
Cum plures Itali magna virtute redundant,  
His erat innatus pavor et fuga luxuriesque.* WA, II, lines 108 - 110, page 138.

<sup>83</sup>WA, II, line 111, page 138.

<sup>84</sup>*...Itali simul omnes conglomerati,  
Parte alia stabant: etenim certamine belli*



Germans and resulted in their downfall (and thus the Norman victory) it is hard to see how William was *not* blaming the Italians for Leo IX's defeat at Civitate. Wolf also ascribed "conspicuously complimentary treatment of the Lombards" to William,<sup>85</sup> and again his assessment is somewhat lacking - William admired various individual Lombards, such as Melo and Arduin who were the first patrons of the Normans, but there is no evidence that this was because they were Lombards and it is far more likely that they were praised as role models for their personal qualities.<sup>86</sup> In fact, in his only specific reference to the Lombard people, again at Civitate, William stated that the Germans were "relying in error on the aid of the host of the apt-to-flee Lombards"<sup>87</sup> and emphasised that the Lombards were in the Italian battle line that fled from Richard of Aversa, the flight of which determined the outcome of the field.<sup>88</sup>

To divide the peoples of the southern peninsula with the broad brush strokes of terms such as Apulians and Calabrians would be obscuring one of the most important aspects of the region which becomes manifest in the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, the strong element of the highly localised identities of the cities. The people of Venice play such a significant role that it is possible to try and determine some traits which are common to Venetians, and in similar vein many of the southern Italian cities emerge with an element of individuality.<sup>89</sup> The Baresi are portrayed as independent and brave, fighting their

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*Non aptare suas acies recto ordine norant.*

*'...Occidit illuc*

*Plurima gens Latii bello, pars maxima fugit.*' WA, II, lines 193 - 195, 208 - 209, page 142.

<sup>85</sup>Kenneth Wolf even cites the passage concerning the poor organisation of the Italian contingent, but has failed to recognise that William only uses the term *Itali* in a very general sense, and it is made clear in the text that he considers the Lombards as part of this group. Wolf, page 126.

<sup>86</sup>See 'Exceptions to the rule' below. Wolf grouped Melo, Arduin and Argyro together as if they were all one ethnic group and seems to have failed to notice that William's use of language stresses that while Melo and his son Argyro were southern Italian Lombards (*Langobardus*), Arduin came from Lombardy in the north (*Lombardus*). Wolf, page 126.

<sup>87</sup>*Gens Alemannorum stipata satellite multo,*

*Longobardorum frustra confisa fugacis*

*Auxilio turbae.*' WA, II, lines 142 - 144, page 140.

<sup>88</sup>WA, II, lines 183 - 185, page 142.

<sup>89</sup>See below for a discussion of the Venetians.

besiegers with great success and ferocity.<sup>90</sup> They would seem to be one of the few peoples able to match the Normans' spirit for when "the Normans pressed on fiercely ... the no less vehement citizens resisted."<sup>91</sup> It might be because of this particular military talent that theirs are the only citizens specifically mentioned as being present on the Sicilian campaign.<sup>92</sup> The independent spirit of the Baresi is manifest both in their resisting Robert Guiscard's siege for three years and their readiness to join any major rebellion against his authority.<sup>93</sup> By contrast William stressed the steadfast loyalty of the citizens of Giovenazzo, who refused to surrender their city to Robert Guiscard's rebellious nobles despite the danger to their hostages.<sup>94</sup> While the love of the men of Giovenazzo for their lord was so strong that they were prepared to suffer siege and see their hostage children die, the citizens of Trani endured a siege of fifty days before compelling their Lord, Peter II of Trani, to leave the city and surrendering to their besiegers.<sup>95</sup> Such behaviour illustrates that it is perhaps wrong to focus so much on the power of individual lords while downplaying the political strength of the people within the city. This balance of power naturally varied from city to city; William recorded that the citizens of Salerno endured a siege for eight months before deserting their lord<sup>96</sup> and by the fourth month they had already been reduced "into such hunger that the masses only had the strength to live by eating dogs, horses, rats and the corpses of asses."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>WA, II, lines 480 - 573, pages 158 - 162.

<sup>91</sup>'*Acriter insistunt Normanni, nec minus acres Obsistunt cives.*' WA, II, lines 516 - 517, page 160.

<sup>92</sup>WA, III, line 235, page 176.

<sup>93</sup>WA, III, lines 509 - 667, pages 192 - 200.

<sup>94</sup>WA, III, lines 539 - 547, page 194.

<sup>95</sup>WA, III, lines 371 - 389, page 184.

<sup>96</sup>Gisulf II of Salerno.

<sup>97</sup>'*Quartus erat mensis completus ab obsidione; Tanta fames miserae cives invaserat urbis, Ut canibus vel equis vel muribus aut asinorum Turba cadaveribus vix vivere posset edendo.*' WA, III, lines 427 - 430, pages 186 - 188.

Terms used to describe the 'Native' Italians

<i>Term</i>	<i>Frequency</i>					<i>Total</i>
	Book I	Book II	Book III	Book IV	Book V	
<i>Calabri</i>		5	4	1		10
<i>Langobardi</i>	3	3		1		7
<i>Lombardi</i>	2					2
<i>Latii / Latini</i>	6	2				8
<i>(Gens) Appula</i>	2	3	2			7
<i>Itali</i>		5				5
<i>(Gens) Ausonia / Ausonii</i>	1	1				2
<i>Indigenae</i>	1	1				2
<i>Campani</i>		1	1			2
<i>Samnites</i>	1	1				2
<i>Sabini</i>		1				1
<i>Lucani</i>			1			1
<i>Romani</i>		1				1
<i>Quirites</i>				2		2

William was often ambiguous in his terminology - intermingling classical terms such as *Latii*, *Ausonii*, *Samnites* and *Sabini* with *Itali*, *Lombardi*, *Romani* and *Calabri*. Given the classical nature of his Latin and the epic theme of his history this is hardly surprising - but it also serves to conceal - to an extent - exactly who the Normans were fighting against, an ambiguity that perhaps was necessary in a frontier society that was beginning to stabilise. In some respects William seems to be classing people by their geographical situation as defined by ancient (pre-Byzantine) boundaries rather than by race - possibly because large areas of the southern peninsula were so heterogeneous. The large number of terms employed to describe the natives of southern Italy also reflects both the political and racial reality of the peninsula. Were it not for his employment of the term *Itali* in Book Two, it would be easy to believe that Italy was a place, not a people, and indeed the meagre five references to Italians from a total of fifty make it possible to assert this conclusion. *Itali* is such a general term that it was perhaps applied by outsiders rather than a self appellation and in many ways William uses it in a similar fashion to the way contemporary Byzantines would use the term 'Frank' and 'Italian' to describe all westerners. The context it is applied in shows that William used it to describe all the non - Norman peoples of southern Italy. The southern peninsula is far more readily divided into the peoples of Campania, Calabria and Apulia overlapped by the Lombards (and *Indigenae* for occasional obfuscation). This is not the whole story though, for William also chooses to employ a number of classical terms such as *Latii*, *Samnites*, *Sabini*, *Lucani*, *Romani*<sup>98</sup> and *Quirites*.<sup>99</sup> Thus while the number of classical references to the Greeks tailed

<sup>98</sup>Shaded above as it is impossible to be certain whether William is referring to the citizens of Rome or referring to 'the Romans' in the same manner as 'the Latins'. In Book Four William refers to Robert dismissing the 'Roman army' (*agmina romulea*) that he had led back to Salerno, but this is followed by the qualitative statement that he had led 'six thousand knights and thirty thousand infantry to Rome', and thus the context implies that for William the 'Roman' army is merely the army that sacked Rome, rather than an army composed of Roman citizens, for there would have been no point in leading them back to Salerno. WA, IV, lines 563-566, page 234.

<sup>99</sup>Shaded above as it is included in the table as a classical term, but stands apart from all the others as it refers to the people of a city rather than a people of a region.

off slightly in Book Two as their direct presence in Italy decreased, there was a concordant increase in classical terms used to describe the populace of southern Italy. Book Three concentrates on the regions of the South, and more particularly on the actions of the various cities, and thus there are fewer classical references than before - only *Lucani*, the umbrella terms *Gens Ausonia*, *Latii*, *Sabini* and *Samnites* fail to appear (although the geographical context of the plot renders only the first two likely). The perhaps more modern general term of *Itali* is also discarded in favour of the more appropriate regional groupings of Apulia, Calabria and Campania. The paucity of references in the fourth and fifth books reflect the fact that the majority of the story takes place in the Balkans, and indeed the references in Book Four to the Calabrians and the Lombards refer to the infantry division of Robert Guiscard's forces.<sup>100</sup>

The segmented nature of the peninsula is further illustrated by the number of references to cities acting as independent political entities. Book One tends to deal with the broader tapestry of events, and thus the references are comparatively small - only Bari, Monopoli, Giovenazzo and Trani are described as acting in their own right. In Book Two the more complex picture of southern Italian political life emerges as William lists all the cities represented at the battle of Civitate: Troia, Trani, Venosa, Otranto, Acerenza, Benevento, Telese, Boiano, Capua, Spolento, Fermo, Aversa and Bari. In addition William records the conquest of Rossano, Cosenza, Gerace, Cariati and Melfi. In the following book the cities emerge once more as strong political entities, able to a large extent to decide their own fate. Bari, Giovenazzo, Trani, Bisceglia, Amalfi, Salerno, Corato, Andria, Bitonto, Cosenza and Ascoli are all referred to as distinct political entities. Bari was the last stronghold of Byzantine power and influence on the peninsula, and thus it is interesting that William distinguishes between Baresi and Greeks on both occasions

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<sup>100</sup>WA, IV, line 373, page 224.

when he refers to a contingent from that city accompanying Robert on his Sicilian campaign.<sup>101</sup> Here is a clear distinction between the Greek allies who had helped defend the city and the citizens themselves. It would seem evident therefore that however influenced Bari may have been by Greek language, culture, and politics, it retained in its own eyes and in the eyes of its neighbours, a distinct and separate racial identity.

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<sup>101</sup>“The Duke commanded the Normans, Calabrians, Baresi and the Greeks that he had previously captured to be strengthened by the body of Christ.” WA, III, lines 235 - 236, page 176. “Forthwith all the Greeks with Stephan Pateranus, who were from the captured Bari, were allowed to depart. In this way the most gentle Duke sent the enemy away unpunished, because with these kindly feelings he would be reconciled to them. Accompanied by the Baresi, Calabrians, the hostages from Palermo and his own soldiers, the Duke went to the walls of the city of Melfi.” WA, III, lines 344 - 350, page 182.

## The Venetians

The northern Italian city of Venice, mentioned only in the fourth and fifth books of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, plays such a uniquely independent role compared to its neighbours that it merits a separate examination for any evidence of behavioural traits which might typify the Venetian people. The scale of the role of the Venetian allies in the Byzantine Emperor Alexius I Comnenus' defence against Robert Guiscard's campaign is illustrated by the fact that there are ten direct references to the Venetians made by William in the fourth book, the same as the number of allusions to the Greeks. As William rendered his account of Robert Guiscard's final campaigns he took pains to emphasise the strengths of the men of the floating city: part of the reason for this would of course be the common narrative trend to exaggerate the strengths of one's enemies, a device which sweetens failure as well as success; but the prominence given to them by the *Gesta* and indeed Alexius' employment of them (for the Byzantine fleet itself was hardly an incompetent body) suggests that William's praise of their strengths was not mere rhetoric. William observed of these northern Italians that "no people is stronger in naval battles and in reckoning a course through the seas."<sup>102</sup> The Venetians were subsequently portrayed as attacking the Normans fiercely, playing to their strengths by confining the more timid of Robert Guiscard's fleet to the harbour and overcoming those brave enough to oppose them.<sup>103</sup> The Venetian strengths would therefore seem to be their primacy in naval combat and the courage and self-assurance to employ their skills - but did they have

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<sup>102</sup>...*gens nulla valentior ista*

*Aequoreis bellis, ratiumque per aequora ductu.* WA, IV, lines 284 - 285, page 220.

<sup>103</sup>WA, IV, lines 291 - 307, page 220.



any vices? William did not exactly accuse them of greed, but noted that when famine forced the majority of the inhabitants of Dyrrakhion to flee the city “remaining in Dyrrakhion for fifteen days the Venetian people took pains to remove anything of use” before decamping back to their ships, which they roofed and moored together in order to weather the winter season.<sup>104</sup> These brief statements would appear to be the only real information William provided about the character of the Venetians, portraying them as an opportunist and able people, but there is a further instance where his silence speaks louder than words.

The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* provides very little information on the Venetians directly, but an examination of William’s account of the actions of one Venetian in particular gives far greater insights into how its inhabitants may have been perceived in southern Italy. This Venetian, Dominico, unhappy with his exclusion from the council of the Venetian commander, struck a bargain with Robert Guiscard and opened the city of Dyrrakhion to him.<sup>105</sup> What is significant is that William made no comment on his treachery, but instead merely noted that “the Venetian rejoiced, for after the surrender everything which had been promised to him was fulfilled.”<sup>106</sup> There are three possible reasons for this silence: firstly William approved of the Venetian’s actions because he helped Robert Guiscard, secondly William saw nothing wrong in the betrayal because the Venetian had been unjustly refused the good lordship of the Venetian commander,<sup>107</sup> and thirdly William made no condemnation because this is how Venetians were expected to behave. There is a relevant comparison here between the actions of the Venetian and

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<sup>104</sup> ‘...Remorans ter quinque diebus  
Gens studet utilibus vacuare Venetica rebus  
Dirachium.’ WA, V, lines 84 - 86, page 240.

<sup>105</sup> WA, IV, lines 449 - 505, pages 228 - 230.

<sup>106</sup> ‘Et quae pollicitus fuerat, post deditonem  
Cuncta sibi gaudet completa Veneticus esse.’ WA, IV, lines 504 - 505, page 230.

<sup>107</sup> This incident is discussed below in Chapter IV with reference to the duties of a lord.

the actions of Godfrey of Uggiano who betrayed the confidence of his rebellious master Geoffrey of Conversano to Robert Guiscard - he was rewarded, but condemned by William for "who afterwards would trust that man? He is called a traitor by all the people of Latium."<sup>108</sup> This precedent rules out the first possible cause of William's silence, which leaves the other two options - both of which may be correct. Certainly any man with access to the gates should have been well looked after by his lord, but perhaps William didn't bother to condemn the Venetian because such a betrayal was expected of the race? This is not mere speculation for as William recorded, when the gates of Dyrrakhion were opened by Dominico, "the inhabitants, seeing themselves attacked inside and out, proclaimed the Venetian army treacherous"<sup>109</sup> - perhaps they knew something we don't?

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<sup>108</sup> *...sed quis post crederet illi?*

*Traditor est Latii populo vocitatus ab omni.* WA, II, lines 474 - 475, page 158.

<sup>109</sup> *Sic habitatores intusque forisque videntes*

*Sese impugnari, malefida Venetica clamant*

*Agmina.* WA, IV, lines 494 - 496, page 230.

## The Normans

One people about whom William had plenty to say were the Normans whose conquest of Southern Italy he detailed. William was able to view the Normans from two perspectives: who they were, and where they had come from; for as he revealed, the two were not necessarily the same. The *Gesta* explained that

because the wind, which the tongue of their native soil calls 'north', brought these men to the northern shores of the region from which they departed to seek the Latin lands, and because among these men it is 'man', which is named 'homo' amongst us, they are called 'Normans', that is men of the North wind.<sup>110</sup>

This would appear to be a simple definition of the Norman *gens*, but William was merely explaining the origins of the people, not their identity, for he also recorded that

whatever pernicious man of the neighbourhood sought refuge with those men they would receive him with rejoicing, instructing him in the characteristic traits and language of their people, so that one people was formed, whatever their origins appeared to be.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> *Hos quando ventus, quem lingua soli genialis  
Nort vocat, advexit boreas regionis ad oras  
A qua digressi fines petiere latinos,  
Et man est apud hos, homo quod perhibetur apud nos,  
Normanni dicuntur, id est homines boreales.* WA, I, lines 6 - 10, page 98.

<sup>111</sup> *Si vicinorum quis perniciosus ad ipsos*

Thus in William's view the identity of a people depended upon their '*mos*' and '*lingua*' - customs and language - more than their stock: common values thus determined identity. This was one of the reasons why it was possible to regard the children and grandchildren of immigrants as Norman despite their having been born and raised in Apulia: a pertinent example being Robert Guiscard's first born son Boamund, '*loco Apulus, gente Normannus*' - 'Apulian by place, Norman by family/race'.<sup>112</sup> The importance of customs and language in determining identity meant that (according to Robert the Monk of Reims) Boamund could announce to the assembled vassals of Roger of Sicily and Roger Borsa at the siege of Amalfi in 1096 '*Nonne et nos Francigenae sumus?*'<sup>113</sup> William of Apulia, his name itself suggesting a juxtaposition of Norman identity with Apulian origin, clearly felt that the identity of the Normans was visible through their character rather than their actual origin. But what, according to the *Gesta*, was this identity?

The Normans were noted for their "rough knights"<sup>114</sup> and while it was characteristic of William to focus on the prowess of individuals such as Richard of Capua and Robert Guiscard, the general impression given of Norman military power is that of an unstoppable tide. In one passage William ascribed the reluctance of Gisulf II of Salerno to marry his sister to Robert to the fact that "the Gauls seemed to be a savage, barbarous awful race of inhuman disposition."<sup>115</sup> In truth the real reason for Gisulf's hesitation may have been the political possibilities the union held for Robert, disgust for the Normans

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*Confugiebat, eum gratanter suscipiebant.*

*Moribus et lingua, quoscumque venire videbant,*

*Informant propria, gens efficiatur ut una.*' WA, I, lines 165 -168, page 108.

<sup>112</sup>WM, IV, 349, pages 232 - 233.

<sup>113</sup>RM, II, iii iv, pages 740 - 742.

<sup>114</sup>'*Gens Normannorum feritate insignis equestri.*' WA, I, line 4, page 98.

<sup>115</sup>'...*sed quia Galli*

*Esse videbantur gens effera, barbara, dira,*

*Mentis inhumanae.*' WA, II, lines 426 - 428, page 154.

seems unlikely given that there had been prior marriages between the two families.<sup>116</sup> It would appear therefore that William is deliberately inventing a reason for Gisulf's hesitation - if this is the case then the *Gesta* would seem to have been deliberately promoting the perception or 'myth' that the Normans were savage and ruthless: this can be construed as psychological warfare; opponents who believed in their savage and ruthless reputation would be far more likely to flee when under pressure; a man who fights believing that he will lose usually does. In this manner William's poem can be seen to be deliberately conforming to the accepted typology of the Norman race described by Graham Loud in his discussion of the '*Gens Normannorum*': a warlike nature and cunning.<sup>117</sup> In a slightly ambiguous use of the term *Gens gallorum*<sup>118</sup> the *Gesta* even goes so far as to describe the Gauls as "more powerful in the strengths of arms than every people."<sup>119</sup> Norman courage (and confidence) in battle may be defined by the reaction of Robert's nobles on receiving intelligence of the approach of Alexius I Comnenus' army, William recording that

the fierce disposition of those men welcomed a brave plan from some of them to leave the camp, falling upon the enemy resolutely, so that the assault might terrify them.<sup>120</sup>

Robert Guiscard rejected the plan on the grounds that it would be better not to attack the enemy until their numbers could be discerned. As to the nature of the original

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<sup>116</sup>Which I shall discuss in greater detail in the following chapter.

<sup>117</sup>G.A. Loud, 'The *Gens Normannorum* - myth or reality?', in *Anglo Norman Studies*, Volume IV, (Boydell Press, 1981), page 111.

<sup>118</sup>See below.

<sup>119</sup>'*Gens nisi Gallorum, quae gente potentior omni Viribus armorum.*' WA, III, lines 101 - 102, page 168.

<sup>120</sup>'...*Effera quorum*

*Mens erat, audaci dimittere castra quibusdam*

*Consilio placuit, venientibus indubitanter*

*Hostibus occurrens ut terreat impetus illos.*' WA, IV, lines 347 - 350, page 222.

immigrants, William believed that "the one inclination of all was to amass riches."<sup>121</sup> As a group, or indeed as individuals, the *Gesta* never portrayed them as lacking in intelligence - indeed if we only had William's account of their existence they would be renowned as much for their cunning as their military prowess.<sup>122</sup> The cunning of individuals is highlighted - such as the ploy used by Robert Guiscard to gain access to a well defended monastery,<sup>123</sup> as well as that of the race as a whole. Like Kurosawa's fictitious bodyguard Yojimbo they would divide their loyalties - increasing in strength while they watched their 'lords' weaken, for

at no time was an outright victory of the Lombards pleasing to the Normans, lest it turn round suffering onto themselves. From the beginning the destruction of each different ruler was prevented, now supporting these men and then giving favour to those men. In such manner Gallic cunning deceived the Ausonians, no-one was allowed to be seized fully by a triumphant enemy.<sup>124</sup>

William seemed to admire their cunning in using the quarrels amongst their 'employers' (since they were mercenaries rather than vassals) to increase their foothold on the peninsula. At the same time though the *Gesta* highlighted the avarice which William believed to be the motivating factor behind the Normans' alternating support of different masters:

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<sup>121</sup>WA, I, line 38, page 100.

<sup>122</sup>Indeed, Norman ingenuity lives on in modern French; to describe someone as 'Normand' implies that they are shrewd and crafty and 'une réponse Normand' is an evasive answer!

<sup>123</sup>WA, II, lines 332 - 354, page 150.

<sup>124</sup>*'Numquam Normannis, ne poena rediret in ipsos, Longobardorum placuit victoria prorsus. Funditus everti discordem quemque vetabat Nunc favor additus his, et nunc favor additus illis. Decipit Ausonios prudentia Gallica; nullum Plena lance capi permittit ab hoste triumphum.'* WA, I, lines 156 - 161, page 106.

since the thinking of the world is inclined towards greed, and money conquers without discrimination, at one time this man, at another time that man they would hold in contempt - for they would always stay close to the man giving more; everyone rejoiced more willingly to serve him from whom they received more.<sup>125</sup>

Terms used to describe the Normans						
Term	Frequency					Total
	Book I	Book II	Book III	Book IV	Book V	
<i>Normanni / Gens Normannica</i>	26	19	6	2	4	57
<i>Galli</i>	27	6	1			33
<i>Franci</i>	4	5				9
<i>Christicolae</i>			2			2
<i>Cultores Christi</i>			1			1

The gradual decrease in any references to the Normans throughout the text reflects the changing emphases as the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* progresses. In the first book there is an overwhelming number of references to the Normans, as William related a story

<sup>125</sup> *Sed quia Mundanae mentis meditamina prona  
Sunt ad avaritiam, vincitque pecunia passim,  
Nunc hoc nunc illo contempto, plus tribuenti  
Semper adhaerebant; servire libentius illi  
Omnes gaudebant, a quo plus accipiebant.* WA, I, lines 140 -144, page 106.



which consisted predominantly of differing peoples struggling for land and authority. Book Two continued in much the same vein, but the emphasis is equally on the rise of the Norman princes, in particular the Hauteville family, and such individual emphases reflect the decreasing references to the Norman people. In Book Three, as with Book Two, the emphasis of the story is on internal disputes between the greater magnates of the day, and thus there is a slightly reduced emphasis on ethnic distinctions as for the greater part of the book the Normans were fighting amongst themselves and so there is little need for distinction provided by racial terms - with its focus on the actions of the city states and individual magnates the book resembles a pocket who's who of the political landscape of the south.

As can be seen above William has a limited vocabulary to describe the settlers from northern Europe, but as the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* progresses he becomes even more selective in his terminology, and by the end of Book Two limits himself only to using the word *Normanni*. I have shaded the use of *Galli* in Book Three, as it is used in reference to the First Crusade rather than a people within southern Italy. It is interesting though that William has chosen *Galli* rather than *Franci* to describe the massed armies of North and South France, Italy (and to a small extent Germany). The terms *Cultores Christi* and *Christicolae* are also shaded as they are communal terms used to describe the whole of Robert's crusading army, and thus include a number of distinct ethnic groups.<sup>126</sup> The frequency of William's use of *Franci* would support Robert Bartlett's suggestion that it only became a common term for the peoples of north-western Europe after the First Crusade (in particular following the popularity of the *Gesta Francorum*), although it may

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<sup>126</sup>During the preparations for the battle before the city walls of Palermo the Duke orders the Normans, Calabrians, Baresi and Greeks (captured previously at the siege of Bari) to take communion. These men are the *Christicolae*. WA, III, lines 235-236, page 176.

have been employed so few times simply because it was such a general (and perhaps modern) term.<sup>127</sup>

In describing the Normans there was far less opportunity for William to employ classical language than in the case of the peoples of Italy and the Greeks. Wolf has suggested that his use of the term *Galli* - absolutely interchangeable with *Normanni* in the first book - links them "to the Gauls made famous in their struggle with Julius Caesar".<sup>128</sup> While one might draw such an association, it would be unusual for William to make it, for not only is William trying to imply that the Normans (through their vigour and common descent from Troy) are the true heirs of the Romans on the peninsula, hence his linguistic subtlety when referring to the Byzantine Empire and the Greeks, but the Gauls were also defeated by the Romans - hardly an appropriate metaphor for displacement of the Greeks from the lands of Aeneas. *Galli* is used in the *Gesta* as an alternative to *Normanni* to prevent monotonous repetition, and *Normanni*, while not a classical term, was a suitably old ethnic term with resonances (for the northern elements of its audience at least) to match the feel of the work. The most revealing use of the term *Normanni* is in William's account of the Battle of Dyrrakhion in Book Four:

Along with the Lombards the Calabrians were terrified and almost all the sailors possessed by the Duke sought flight; even the knights of the Duke were scared by the first assault, when the charge of the enemy pressed heavily upon them. This heedless group, having crossed the river, came into certain narrow places... Such a straightened position seemed desperate to the Normans.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup>R. Bartlett, *The Making of Europe* (Penguin, 1993) page 102.

<sup>128</sup>Wolf, page 130.

<sup>129</sup>*Cum Langobardis Calabri terrentur, et omnis  
Pene fugam petiit, fuerat qui sub duce nauta;*

This passage first makes a clear distinction between the Lombards, Calabrians and sailors on the one hand, and the knights (*equestris gens ducis*) on the other. These knights entered into a confined area, which subsequently (because of limited room to manoeuvre and vulnerability to arrow fire) seemed desperate to them, the *Normanni*. In this way William directly equated the two terms, thus if you were one of the mounted men of the Duke then you must have been a Norman. This is unlikely to be applicable to all the Duke's mounted men, but it shows that as the Normans were equated with mounted combat it was possible to describe a mounted group as 'Norman'. As William's younger contemporary (and Alexius I Comnenus' daughter) Anna Comnena was to comment of Nicephorus Euphorbenus some forty years later

on horseback he gave the impression that he was not a Roman at all, but a native of Normandy. The young man was certainly remarkable for his horsemanship - a natural genius, in fact.<sup>130</sup>

This comment, coming from one who professed to dislike westerners, illustrates how such an association was made even by the Normans' enemies.

One of the most interesting facets of William's Normans is their relationship with the Papacy and religion in general. The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* deliberately obfuscates whatever tensions may have existed between the new settlers and successive Popes, and it is easy to agree with Wolf who suggested that "if the *Gesta* were the only source we had

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*Ipsaque concursu primo terretur equestris  
Gens ducis, hostilis dum praegravat impetus illam.  
Venit ad angustos transgresso flumine quosdam  
Haec incauta locos...*

*Aspera Normannis angustia tanta videtur.* WA, IV, lines 373 - 378, 388, page 224.

<sup>130</sup>AC, X, iii, page 301; Leib, II, page 197.

for Norman-papal relations in this period, the Apulian Normans would have been remembered as dutiful sons of the church."<sup>131</sup> According to William's account Leo IX did not wish to fight the Normans at Civitate; the battle is an accident caused by the arrogant blood lust of the Germans.<sup>132</sup> Before the battle the Normans attempted to placate Leo, seeking to become his vassals, and following their success they humbly begged his forgiveness for fighting.<sup>133</sup> Subsequently the relations between the Normans and Pope Nicholas II are also depicted as harmonious, and indeed the Pope was so enamoured of the Normans that he granted Robert Guiscard sovereignty over Calabria, Apulia and Latium.<sup>134</sup> Later, throughout Book Four, William carefully nurtured the image of Robert Guiscard as the protector of Pope Gregory VII.<sup>135</sup> While the Normans might have used subterfuge to gain forcible entry into a particularly strategically placed monastery so that they might use it as a fortress, they respect the rights of the monks and neither kill nor eject them.<sup>136</sup> The Normans, as viewed through the stanzas of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* are portrayed as a people who respect the sanctity of the cloth, provide protection to the Papacy against its enemies, and in return are recognised by the Church as the legitimate rulers in the south.

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<sup>131</sup>Wolf, page 134.

<sup>132</sup>WA, II, lines 93 - 107, pages 136 - 138.

<sup>133</sup>WA, II, lines 85 - 92, page 136; *Ibid.*, Book II, lines 261 - 263, page 146.

<sup>134</sup>WA, II, lines 404 - 405, page 154.

<sup>135</sup>I shall discuss the importance of this portrayal in the following chapter.

<sup>136</sup>WA II, lines 355 - 356, page 150.

## Exceptions to the rule

As has been illustrated above, many of the racial groups portrayed within the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* are shown in a less than complimentary light. There are a few definite exceptions to these stereotypes however, and the portrayal of these men is interesting as it provides a window onto those virtues deemed praiseworthy in contemporary society and in one case may even shed a light onto the motivation behind a particular portrayal of an individual.

According to William the Lombard race was not one to be particularly venerated, characterised by an undependable and fearful nature. Despite this the Lombard Melo was always referred to in the *Gesta* with considerable respect. According to William's poem, the Normans first came to southern Italy as mercenaries at Melo's invitation, having encountered this fugitive from Byzantine authority at Mount Gargano:

Several of these men (Normans) climbed to the heights of Mount Gargano, to you Archangel Michael, fulfilling the debt of a vow. There they saw to be present a man clothed in the fashion of the Greeks, called Melo. They marvelled at the unfamiliar clothing of the exile and that the unfamiliar wheelings of a turban were present on his bound head. While they saw this man they enquired who and from where he might be. He replied that he was a Lombard by birth, and a citizen of noble rank from

Bari, forced into exile from the territories of his native land by the roughness of the Greeks.

*Horum nonnulli Gargani culmina montis  
Conscendere, tibi, Michael archangele, voti  
Debita solventes. Ibi quendam conspicientes  
More virum Graeco vestitum, nomine Melum,  
Exulis ignotam vestem capitique ligato  
Insolitos mitrae mirantur adesse rotatus.  
Hunc dum conspiciunt, quis et unde sit ipse requirunt.  
Se Langobardum natu civemque fuisse  
Ingenuum Bari, patriis respondit a esse  
Finibus extorrem Graeca feritate coactum.<sup>137</sup>*

This particular passage of William's is extremely interesting because it consists of a number of contrasts. The choice of the word *mitrae* for Melo's headgear is particularly interesting: in mediaeval Latin a common translation might be 'bonnet', but William quantifies this with the phrase 'unfamiliar wheelings'. In classical Latin, more appropriate to William's style and perception of himself as a poet, *mitrae* is commonly translated as a 'turban', an interpretation which makes the qualifying adjectives more understandable - for the Normans would most likely have been less familiar with this than a bonnet. There is a further depth to William's selection since in classical Latin the term *mitrae* applied to feminine headgear or an article worn by effeminate men - since Melo is described as being clothed in the fashion of the Greeks this would seem to be a further dig at that race.<sup>138</sup> Despite wearing this effeminate article the use of *vir* early in the sentence makes it very

<sup>137</sup>WA, I, lines 11 - 20, pages 98 - 100.

<sup>138</sup>Lewis & Short, *Op. Cit.*, page 1152.

clear that despite wearing Greek clothing, Melo is a real man.<sup>139</sup> In one respect the *Gesta* is saying that Melo is a man, dressed as a woman - no wonder the Normans marvelled at his unfamiliar clothing and approached him! The second interesting combination that William made was that Melo was a citizen of noble rank and yet a fugitive, a man with no home or (supposedly) material wealth. Finally Melo was dressed as a Greek, yet he is a Lombard - by birth. There is a particular dignity to this phrase, for it seems to give us a brief insight into who Melo was and what may have inspired others to follow him. While the Normans might accept anyone who could speak their tongue as their own, Melo's stress that he was "*Langobardum natu*" indicates a fierce pride in his heritage - a passion that may have inspired others to follow him.

In many respects from the very beginning of the *Gesta* William portrayed Melo as something of an exception, but there is further justification within the poem for setting him aside from his compatriots. In the battle which saw the end of Melo's southern Italian ambitions at the hands of Basil Boiannes, William was careful to balance the leader's retreat with a dignified epitaph, calling him 'Mighty Melo'. If the *Gesta* is to be believed, the trust and love which the Normans placed in Melo's son, Argyro, stemmed from their respect for Melo "who had been gentle to those men."<sup>140</sup> Finally the poem stresses that such a man was treated with respect even in exiled death, the German emperor Henry II giving him a royal funeral.<sup>141</sup>

What had Melo done to earn such a favourable account compared to his fellow Lombards in the poem? Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, William identified Melo as

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<sup>139</sup>I owe this insight into the significance of the lexical structure of this passage to Professor Adrian Gratwick.

<sup>140</sup>'*Hi se non aurum profitentur amare, sed ipsum, Cuius eis placidus fuerat pater.*' WA, I, lines 425 - 426, page 122.

<sup>141</sup>WA, I, lines 100 - 103, page 104.



the man responsible for the Norman presence in southern Italy - thus whatever had been achieved was in some respect due to him. Secondly Melo seems to have provided for his mercenaries, arming those who required weapons.<sup>142</sup> Last, but not least, under Melo's supervision the Normans got their first taste of the wealth available from plunder in Apulia, and had their first taste of victory under his leadership in battle against the Greek Catepan Tornicius. In this manner he would seem to have fulfilled the requirements of a good lord, enough certainly to raise him above his compatriots.<sup>143</sup>

The Byzantine Emperor Romanus IV Diogenes is also portrayed by William in a different light to his fellow Greeks, commonly known for their effeminacy and cowardice. The key to his portrayal is his actions, but here it is possible to argue that William portrayed Romanus not only as a good lord but also as a Norman. Obviously the *Gesta* does not refer to Romanus as a Norman, but the qualities of strength, courage and cunning that he manifests are the ones which the Normans saw as their own: Romanus displayed his cunning by scattering valuables across the camp in order to buy his men more time to escape; his strength was illustrated by his fighting alongside his men until injury resulted in his capture; finally his courage was shown in his interview with the Alp Arslan. When Alp Arslan asked Romanus what would have happened had their roles been reversed, Romanus had no hesitation in telling his erstwhile enemy that he would have been beheaded or hung. This conversation has a sinister parallel in Henry V's interview of "three corrupted men" at Southampton, asking men he knew to be traitors how to deal with a man who had committed a minor offence. Shakespeare's Henry

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<sup>142</sup>William's suggestion that the newcomers were advised only to carry what was necessary for the journey and that 'those in need' were armed by Melo, hints that a large number of them were of the lowest strata of mounted warrior who could not afford to provide suitable equipment either for themselves or their men.

<sup>143</sup>The identifiable traits of a 'good lord' will be discussed in the following chapter.

judged how severely to punish the three men based upon the amount of mercy they would extend to another, and thus when they protest against the sentence of death he pronounced upon them his reply is swift:

The mercy that was quick in us but late  
By your own counsel is suppress'd and kill'd:  
You must not dare, for shame, to talk of mercy;  
For your own reasons turn into your bosoms,  
As dogs turn upon their masters, worrying you.<sup>144</sup>

Since Romanus' reply to Alp Arslan's questioning might well have determined his fate he demonstrated great spirit in the face of adversity by giving such an honest reply. These 'Norman' qualities earn William's admiration, hence his sadness at Romanus' faith in his Greek compatriots and fate at their hands:

The unhappy man believed in vain that having returned he would be emperor, because soon afterwards when that man came to Heraclea he was captured. The captive was deprived of the light, and he whose so noble name was imperial became a monk.<sup>145</sup>

William's contemporary, the Byzantine Emperor Alexius I Comnenus, is also portrayed in a very different light to his Greek kin. The *Gesta* introduced Alexius in the

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<sup>144</sup>Shakespeare, *Henry V*, ed., J.H. Walter (London, 1954), Act II, Scene II, lines 79 - 83.

<sup>145</sup>...*Misero placet imperialis*

*Incassum reditus; quia mox ubi pervenit ille  
Eracleam, capitur, privatur lumine captus;  
Cuius et imperii fuerat tam nobile nomen,  
Monachus efficitur.* WA, III, lines 88 - 92, page 168.

reign of his predecessor, Nicephorus Botaneiates, detailing his military exploits against the rebels Bryennius and Botaneiates. Alexius was described as *victor*, a conqueror, defeating Bryennius in a pitched battle and also as *prudens*, a wise man, for his ploy of feigned retreat which outwitted Basiliacus.<sup>146</sup> The *Gesta* justified Alexius' coup against the Emperor Nicephorus, recording that

At that time the old man mentioned earlier was driven from the throne.  
The warlike Alexius drove him out, angry because of the injury of the  
dismissal of his brother, who had increased the strength of the empire and  
obtained so many triumphs from its enemies.<sup>147</sup>

In this vein Alexius seized power as a redresser of wrongs, a theme which William continued with his stress that "this pleasant man showed no little honour to Robert's daughter" Helena, who had been sidelined when Botaneiates had seized power from Michael VII Ducas.<sup>148</sup> The most pertinent phrase that William used in his descriptions of the contemporary Byzantine Emperor appears in the poem when he summed up his account of Alexius' victories over Bryennius and Basiliacus:

Thus the energetic and wary conqueror Alexius overcame the many  
enemies of the empire with arms or wit.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup>WA, IV, line 90; line 96, page 208.

<sup>147</sup>*'Regni sede senex hac tempestate repulsus  
Praedictus fuerat; bellator Alexius illum  
Expulit iratus, quia non iniuria fratris  
Propter eum dismissa fuit, qui viribus auxit  
Imperium totis, tot nactus ab hoste triumphos.'* WA, IV, lines 142 - 146, page 212.

<sup>148</sup>*'Roberti genitae non parvum blandus honorem  
Exhibet.'* WA, IV, lines 155 - 156, page 212.

<sup>149</sup>*'Impiger et cautus sic victor Alexius hostes  
Imperii multos armis superavit et arte.'* WA, IV, lines 120 - 121, page 210.

This is evidently a statement praising the Emperor Alexius, significantly once again for qualities which the Normans identified with their own race, strength in arms and cunning. There is however a deeper element to these lines, for they echo an earlier statement made by William about Robert Guiscard:

Such was the discretion of the cunning Duke; what he was not able to overcome with arms, more frequently he would overcome by art.<sup>150</sup>

There are two possible reasons for this extremely complimentary portrayal of the Byzantine Emperor, neither of which precludes the validity of the other. The most obvious of these is the role of Alexius within the poem. Alexius was Robert Guiscard's final adversary, and an opponent whom his death prevented him from defeating absolutely. In this sense Alexius fulfils the role of an anti-hero within the text, a role which demanded that in order to be a worthy adversary for the Apulian Duke he had to have the necessary attributes of strength and cunning. For the second of these reasons we should perhaps look to the social and political setting of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* and the possible wishes of its two patrons, Duke Roger Borsa and Urban II. Roger would naturally have been keen for a work which praised his father's strengths, and thus such laudable treatment of Alexius would have been in his interests, but as a Mediterranean ruler he would also have wished to be on good terms with the Byzantine Emperor (who we should not forget employed his brother, Guy), another factor perhaps in such delicate treatment of Alexius. Urban II however would probably have had far more reason than Roger Borsa to wish William to compose a poem with a relatively sympathetic portrayal of the Byzantine Emperor. Urban was extremely interested in bringing about a reconciliation between the Eastern and Western Churches, and this desire was probably

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<sup>150</sup> 'Sic ducis astuti prudentia, quod superare Non armis potuit, superavit saepius arte.' WA, II, lines 476 - 477, page 158.

exploited by Alexius when he asked Urban for military aid at Piacenza in 1095.<sup>151</sup> The audience for William's poem was precisely that part of western society that Alexius would have wished to use as mercenaries in the east, and it is probable that Urban's involvement in the commissioning of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* was with a view to promoting the idea of fighting pagans in the east. Urban, wishing to remain on good terms with Alexius, would have appreciated the importance of western mercenaries respecting Imperial authority and one of the surest ways of doing this would have been to portray the Byzantine Emperor as an able soldier and cunning general.

William's depiction of Alexius Comnenus is far more complex than his justification of the young general's coup and praise of his martial and mental qualities would suggest, for there is a distinct change in William's tone towards the Byzantine Emperor towards the end of the text. This alternative depiction of the Greek ruler begins in the final quarter of the fourth book of the *Gesta* with William's description of Alexius' reaction to his defeat by Robert at Dyrrakhion:

Alexius wept to have been defeated by an enemy inferior in both the wealth and numbers of its people; wounded himself he withdrew, and the weeping man making an inglorious return reflected that he had hoped in vain that he would bring back a glorious triumph.<sup>152</sup>

This alteration in his characterisation of Alexius seems to be a literary device, illustrating the vanity of pride and setting the scene for the triumphant ending of the fourth book

<sup>151</sup>P.Charanis, 'Byzantium, the West and the origin of the First Crusade', in *Byzantion*, Volume 19 (Brussels, 1949), pages 17 - 36.

<sup>152</sup>'...*Lacrimenter Alexius, hostem Praevaluisse sibi, cui nec par copia gentis, Nec par census erat; discedit saucius ipse, Cogitur et lacrimans inglorius ille reverti, Gloria cui fuerat frustra sperata triumph.*' WA, IV, lines 420 - 424, page 226.

with William celebrating that Robert had defeated “the mighty ruler of the Roman Empire”<sup>153</sup> There are three further references to Alexius in the poem, all within the first quarter of the last book. In the first reference Alexius sought battle with Boamund and subsequently fled, having been outmanoeuvred, conforming once more to the Greek stereotype. In the second instance the Byzantine Emperor chose to attack Boamund’s camp rather than face the Norman himself in the field, an example perhaps of his cunning. It is the third and final image of Alexius that is intriguing, for it seems to go against the grain and confirm Alexius as a Greek:

The Normans, mindful of their usual courage rushed swiftly to arms, and the Greeks, accustomed to escape with fleet feet, returned hastily to the walls of the city of Larissa, where Alexius himself hid; he had been overcome so many times that he dared not stray far.<sup>154</sup>

This final depiction of Alexius Comnenus is fascinating because it may well be related directly to contemporary accounts known in the West of the progress of the First Crusade. As has been discussed above, there is evidence that the First Crusade was already in progress while William was writing the third book of his poem, and it is widely believed that by the time he finished Urban II was dead. Can this chronology be related at all to this depiction of the Byzantine Emperor?

The substance of the opening of the fifth book goes back in time, from Robert’s defeat of Henry IV in May 1084 to Boamund’s battles against Alexius in the summer of

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<sup>153</sup> ‘*Imperii rector Romani maximus.*’ WA, IV, line 568, page 234.

<sup>154</sup> ‘*Normanni solitae memores virtutis ad arma  
Concurrunt celeres; solitque fugacibus Argi  
Elabi pedibus, redeunt properanter ad urbis  
Moenia Larissae, qua clausus Alexius ipse  
Non procul audebat totiens superatus abire.*’ WA, V, lines 65 - 69, pages 238 - 240.

1082. William's sudden concentration on Boamund's exploits, inserted out of context before the poem details the second wave of Robert's Balkans campaign, may enable us to give an even more precise dating and explanation for this alteration in his depiction of the Byzantine Emperor. On the 11th September 1098 the Crusaders wrote to Urban II, detailing the troubles they had experienced at Antioch and the lack of support they had had from Alexius Comnenus. In a postscript Boamund himself criticised

the unjust emperor, who promised us many good things, but did very little. For all sorts of ills and obstacles, whatever he could manage, these he inflicted upon us.<sup>155</sup>

We cannot know exactly how broad the audience of this letter was, but we can be certain that knowledge of Crusader dissatisfaction with the Byzantine Emperor and of the acrimony between him and Boamund over Antioch became widespread in the West over the following year. People in the West would have heard rumours of Alexius failing to live up to his promises to assist the Crusaders and would have known of Boamund's successful leadership against the pagan forces sent to relieve Antioch. William of Apulia's sudden concentration on Boamund, set out of context in the final book of his poem, describing a sequence of battles where the Apulian Norman fought and defeated the Greek Emperor, and his portrayal of an Alexius afraid to venture from his safe haven to do battle, may be related to the contemporary events of the First Crusade. The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* may have been composed in part for a patron who wished to promote relations between East and West and promote the idea of Crusading, but its author did not write in a vacuum.

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<sup>155</sup>H. Hagenmeyer, *Die Kreuzzugsbriefe aus den Jahren 1088 - 1100* (Innsbruck, 1902), page 165.



## IV

### Role Models

#### The Military Ideal

The epic theme of the Norman overthrow of Greek rule that William chose as the backdrop of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* proves an excellent medium through which contemporary attitudes towards soldiers and soldiering can be analysed. His account of the Battle of Civitate<sup>1</sup> shows clearly the attributes, both physical and mental, which were deemed necessary for warriors and their generals. The usefulness of this and William's other accounts of military actions is that he not only illustrates the formal procedures of battle such as the importance of different troop dispositions and the tactical ploys that could be played, but also gives a blunt reminder of the physical brutalities of mediaeval combat and a strong sense of what was expected of men in the field.

In the first instance William stresses the importance of the rudimentary field tactics of troop disposition, in particular the importance of keeping men in reserve. This task was allotted at Civitate to Robert Guiscard, who was "to protect the left wing, so that if he saw that there was need of help, he should be prepared to hurry to assist his comrades, and remould those forces."<sup>2</sup> While Robert had probably the least seniority of all his fellow commanders (his elder brother Humphrey and Robert of Capua) we should not infer from this that commanding the reserve was an insignificant role. In fact

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<sup>1</sup>18th June 1053.

<sup>2</sup>...*Cornu servare sinistrum*

*Robertus frater Calabria cum gente iubeter,*

*Ut succurrendum cum viderit esse, paratus*

*Auxilio properet sociis, viresque reformet.*' WA, II, lines 188 - 191, page 142.

Robert's son, Boamund, acclaimed by Douglas as "the ablest soldier in the field" of all the greater Norman leaders of the age, as commander in chief of the Crusading army at the first battle of Antioch chose this position himself.<sup>3</sup> The reasoning behind the tactic of withholding an entire command from the field was expounded in detail by William in his account of Michael Docianus' disposition of his troops at the Battle of Olivento:

Against those men a single wedge formation of Greeks was sent, since they are accustomed not to unloose all the cohorts of the Greeks in the first engagement; but they send first one legion from that place and thereafter another so that through the increased valour of these men the enemy might be discouraged, and the terror of those men enlarged. Thus the commander of the cavalry, while he sees the enemy resisting, chooses to spring forth suddenly with the greater army he had kept back, and thus because of those men he is accustomed to repress the enemy absolutely, through reviving his men's spirits.<sup>4</sup>

It is interesting that William seems to imply that this was a tactic peculiar at that point in time to the Greeks. While the evidence is hardly conclusive we might therefore surmise that the Normans, recognising its value, adopted it from their former enemies (in the same way that Alexius I Comnenus and especially his grandson Manuel I, impressed by the significant value of western style cavalry forces, sought to hire and emulate the

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<sup>3</sup>Douglas, *The Norman Achievement*, page 6. *GF*, IV, pages 36 - 37.

<sup>4</sup>*Contra quos cuneus Graecorum mittitur unus.*

*Non etenim totas Danaï laxare cohortes*

*Primo Marte solent; legionem sed prius unam,*

*Inde aliam mittunt ut virtus aucta suorum*

*Hostes debilitet, terroremque augeat illis.*

*Sic equitum princeps, obniti dum videt hostes,*

*Cum magis electo qui restat milite secum*

*Proripitur subito, viresque retundere prorsus*

*Sic solet hostiles, animos reparando suorum.* *WA*, I, lines 267 - 275, pages 112-114.

Normans and other western mercenaries). The timing of the release of this command into the fray would most likely have been one of the most important factors in deciding the outcome of the battle and thus it is no surprise that throughout the First Crusade Boamund was to choose this position himself. Of course there was also great prestige in being the leader of the host whose arrival signalled the crumbling of the enemy. Reading between the lines of William's epic it is possible to draw the conclusion that at Civitate Robert actually misjudged this crucial timing, for the German contingent managed to hold fast against his brother Humphrey despite his intervention - he had probably either miss-timed his advance or concentrated his forces at the wrong point of the line, the effect of which being that his attack was of little significance for either the enemy or his embattled brother. The Normans were only saved by the fact that the Italian and Lombard contingents of the Papal army crumbled so quickly that Richard of Capua was able to disengage his forces and carry out Robert's job for him.<sup>5</sup> This much is made clear by William, who stated that "The illustrious battle line of the victorious Richard joining them was the cause of the great overthrow of the enemy."<sup>6</sup> In fact one of the reasons that Richard of Capua's initial charge was so successful was the inability of the command opposite him to deploy correctly. The opposing Italian command failed to form a straight line against the opposing forces which effectively weakened their ability to present a solid barrier to counter Richard's charge.

The importance of applying brains rather than brawn to the battlefield is illustrated in the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* on numerous occasions. William related how the future emperor Alexius I Comnenus, while serving the Emperor Nicephorus Botaneiates, outwitted the rebellious Basilacius by feigning flight before returning under the cover of

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<sup>5</sup>WA, II, lines 180 - 256, page 144 - 146.

<sup>6</sup>*Acies praeclara Ricardi*

*Addita victoris, magnae fit causa ruinae*

*Hostibus.* WA, II, lines 253 - 255, page 146.

darkness to destroy his drunken army.<sup>7</sup> Robert Guiscard also used this particular tactic to draw the rebellious Geoffrey of Conversano from the fortress of Montepeloso on the advice of its own custodian Godfrey.<sup>8</sup> Similar foresight was demonstrated at Joannina by Boamund, who stealthily led his cavalry through rough ground to circumvent Alexius' equally cunning strategy of laying caltrops in order to negate the Normans' strongest element - the cavalry charge.<sup>9</sup> But as the *Gesta* records, Boamund himself was outwitted when Alexius Comnenus used this strategy of feigned retreat against him in order to plunder the Norman general's exposed camp.<sup>10</sup> What William does not record about this engagement, but we know from Anna Comnena, is that Alexius handed over his standards to Nicephorus Melissenus and Basil Curticius in order to fool Boamund into thinking he was present in the army.<sup>11</sup> Anna recorded that Alexius did this because he knew that Boamund would endeavour to seek him out on the field, and William implies that this was the reason he charged the Greek host. William attributes Boamund's belief in Alexius' presence to the sheer size of the opposing force and does not mention the emperor's duplicity. This raises the question as to how the false employment of standards was viewed at that time in the west - was such a ploy deemed dishonourable and 'against the rules'? If this were the case and William knew that Alexius had deployed his standards without being present, would he record it to defame the emperor or omit what he believed to be a dishonourable ploy? William's actions in composing the *Gesta* would naturally depend upon how he believed his patrons would wish the current Byzantine emperor to be characterised, and as the years prior to the First Crusade saw greater entente between east and west than either party had been accustomed in the recent past we might expect him therefore to deliberately gloss over details which would show Urban

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<sup>7</sup>WA, IV, lines 93 - 119, pages 208 - 210.

<sup>8</sup>WA, II, lines 459 - 477, pages 156 - 158.

<sup>9</sup>WA, V, lines 6 - 19, page 236.

<sup>10</sup>WA, V, lines 24 - 60, pages 236 238.

<sup>11</sup>AC, V, v, page 169; Leib, II, page 26.

II's ally in a bad light. This is speculative ground, but what is clear is that the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, with its emphasis on military affairs, is in many respects a condensed manual of the various tactical ploys available to military commanders.

The above incidents refer to battles involving large armies, but in fact siege warfare was far more prevalent in western Europe in the eleventh century, a fact that is observable through William's description of the process of the consolidation of Norman authority in the first and second books of the *Gesta*. Cunning was as necessary an attribute as manpower in such conflicts, a fact pertinently demonstrated by William's description of the ruse Robert Guiscard used to take control of a well fortified monastery, faking the death of one of his men so that he and his men might be admitted into the compound for a burial service with their swords concealed in the bier of the 'corpse'.<sup>12</sup> This particular tactic was first recorded by Dudo of St Quentin and attributed to the Viking Alstignus/Hasting, who used the ruse to sack Luna and murder all the Christians therein.<sup>13</sup> Mathieu noted that it was also associated with the Varangian commander Harold Hardrada in the Byzantine campaign of 1038 in Sicily and saw its appearance in the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* as indicative of the incorporation of French and Scandinavian traditions in the work, believing that "The Normans of Italy have all naturally attributed this stratagem to the most famous of their heroes".<sup>14</sup> This may indeed be the case, but there is no reason to believe that Robert Guiscard, familiar with the tactic from the very popular traditions she cites, did not in fact use this ruse to capture the monastery as William would have us believe. Whether Robert did use the ruse or not is of less importance than William's incorporation of it into his history, for here we may observe a manner by which

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<sup>12</sup>WA, II, lines 332 - 354, page 148.

<sup>13</sup>DsQ, I, 6-7, pages 18 - 20.

<sup>14</sup>"Les Normands d'Italie ont tout naturellement attribué ce stratagème au plus fameux de leurs héros." Mathieu, pages 47 - 51. The attribution to Harold may be inaccurate, or he may have employed the ruse from a recollection of Hasting's actions. As Robert's elder brother fought alongside Harold in this campaign it is not impossible that he may have heard of it from a more prosaic source.

such strategic devices were passed on from generation to generation - the geographical setting and protagonists may have changed, but the ruse is still effective and worth recording for the education of William's audience. This concept of education through entertainment is reinforced by William's express alteration of Dudo's tale; for there are very significant differences between the behaviour of Hasting and Robert's respective men following the subterfuge:

He (Alstignus) murders the bishop and slays the count, and then the unarmed clergy standing in the church... the raging pagans massacre the unarmed Christians. All those discovered by the infuriated foe are handed over to be killed. They rage within the precinct of the sanctuary 'like wolves inside a sheepfold'.... And at last all the combat is over, and alas! all the Christians are slain. And the pitiful remnant is led to the ships. As the rulers of the city have been laid low, the rage of the furious Astignus abates.<sup>15</sup>

They (the monks) were neither able to defend themselves, nor did they have any place to flee to; all were taken... However the monastery was not destroyed, nor were the monastic flock expelled from that place. Robert, gathering a large army in that fortress, began to be more loved by those men because he was strong in arms and wise in council.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>DsQ, I, 7, page 20.

<sup>16</sup>...*Nec se defendere possunt,*

*Quo fugiant nec habent; omnes capiuntur...*

*Non monasterii tamen est eversio facta,*

*Non extirpatus grex est monasticus inde.*

*Agmina magna legens castro Robertus in illo,*

*Carior esse suis coepit, quia strenuus armis*

*Consilioque sagax.*' WA, II, lines 352 - 353, 355 - 359, page 150.

The *Gesta* omits any references to fatalities in Robert's execution of this ruse and clearly states that the men of the cloth were left unharmed once Robert had achieved his objective, the strategic *locus* of the monastery itself. In a sharp contrast to Dudo's tale William mentioned no atrocities, and any of his audience familiar with Dudo's text would probably have been keenly aware of the unspoken undertone contrasting the restraint of Robert and his men with his uncivilised northern predecessor. The murder of unarmed innocents, and particularly churchmen, was no longer deemed acceptable in the mid-eleventh century. To those familiar with Dudo's work William's statement that Robert came to be loved as the new guardian and master of the monastery emphasised the difference between the Norman Duke and Hasting, who slaughtered the majority of the occupants of the city and took the survivors away into slavery.

While William highlighted the importance of tactics, he recognised that the martial qualities of soldiers were of paramount importance, and took care to stress that a good general should be able to fight in the field and set a visible physical example to his men. Thus he eloquently described the respective charges of Richard, Count of Aversa, and Robert Guiscard against their more numerous foes, and related Robert's battle in graphic detail:

...undaunted he rushed bravely into the middle of the enemy. With a spear he penetrated those men, and with a sword he mutilated those men, and with strong hands he hurled terrible blows. He fought with both hands; not with a vain spear nor a futile sword, wheresoever he wished his hand to draw down. Thrice thrown down from his horse, thrice recovering through his strengths, returning greater into battle; rage itself directed his spurs. As a lion with gnashing teeth happens to attack less powerful



animals, but if he begins to meet with resistance, maddens and is urged on with more and greater anger kindled - for he releases nothing unhurt; this one he drags away and that one he eats, whatever he is unable to chew he scatters, throwing down all the herd in death - in such wise Robert in various slaughter did not cease from striking the resisting Swabians.<sup>17</sup>

William's words encapsulate the indomitable spirit which was not only the essence of Robert's psyche but also an essential requirement for a successful field general and indeed soldier. To be unseated three times in battle (in full armour) and recover suggests great stamina and martial ability. However it is important not to become too enamoured of Robert's invincibility; this feat was also attributed to William the Conqueror at the Battle of Hastings by William of Poitiers, who wrote that "three horses were killed and fell while beneath him. Three times he sprang to the ground undaunted and without delay avenged the loss of his steed."<sup>18</sup> It is possible that William would have had access to William of Poitiers' *Gesta Guillelmi*, written c1070 - 1077 or would at least have heard some of the stories that circulated about the deeds of the Norman duke. Bearing this in mind it is quite possible that Robert Guiscard was never thrown from his horse at Civitate, but that is hardly consequential in this context for William is portraying Robert as a military ideal.

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<sup>17</sup>*Irruit audacter medios animosus in hostes.  
Cuspide perforat hos, gladio detruncat et illos,  
Et validis manibus horrendos incutit ictus;  
Pugnat utraque manu, nec lancea cassa, nec ensis  
Cassus erat, quocumque manum deducere vellet.  
Ter deiectus equo, ter viribus ipse resumptis,  
Maior in arma redit; stimulos furor ipse ministrat.  
Ut leo, cum frendens animalia forte minora  
Acriter invadit, si quid reperire quod obstet  
Coeperit, insanit, magis et maioribus ira  
Accensa stimulat; nil iam dimittit inultum;  
Hoc trahit, hoc mandit, quod mandi posse negatur  
Dissipat, affligens pecus extialiter omne:  
Taliter obstantes diversa caede Suevos  
Caedere non cessat Robertus.* WA, II, lines 221 - 235, page 144.

<sup>18</sup>"Equi tres ceciderunt sub eo confossi. Ter ille desiluit intrepidus, nec diu mors uectoris inulta remansit." WP, II, 22, page 134.

In terms of reinforcing the prestige of the Hauteville family, if the Duke of Normandy fell and rose three times in battle then the Duke of Apulia should be known to have done so as well. In the 1090's there would be few if any veterans of Civitate alive to contradict such a story. William's description of Robert's martial prowess conforms to and promotes a contemporary ideal, for how dissimilar are William's words to the legendary combat described in *La Chanson de Roland*:

Count Roland is no laggard; he strikes with his spear, while the shaft still lasts. With fifteen blows he has broken and destroyed it; he draws forth Durendal, his fine, naked sword, and spurs on his horse to strike at Chernubles. He breaks his helmet with its gleaming carbuncles, slices off his coif and his scalp, as well as slicing through his eyes and face, his shining hauberk with its close-meshed mail, his whole body right down to his crotch, and right into his saddle which is of beaten gold; his sword came to rest in the horse itself. he slices through its spine, seeking no joint, and flinging them both dead in the meadow on the lush grass.<sup>19</sup>

By comparison with leaders such as Robert Guiscard and Roland a 'poor' general such as the Catepan of Bari, Michael Docianus, fled from battle on the steed of one of his junior officers when unseated from his horse, derogatorily described as a *caballus* - a pack horse or nag.<sup>20</sup> Bravery in battle is a virtue, and is praised in both friend and foe alike; William stressed that the besieged citizens of Bari do not merely cower behind their fortifications during Robert Guiscard's three year siege of the city but engage their attackers before the city walls. So fierce were the ensuing engagements that William

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<sup>19</sup>*The Song of Roland*, ed., trans., G. Burgess (Penguin, 1990), 104, lines 1321 - 1334, page 71.

<sup>20</sup>WA, I, lines 301 - 305, page 114.

compared the opposing forces to two wild boars locked in conflict.<sup>21</sup> There is a distinction however between bravery and impetuosity, and the latter quality was certainly deemed unsuitable by Robert Guiscard who “knew his knights to be distinguished, but did not want any rash undertakings”<sup>22</sup> - forbidding them to attack the opposing Greek army until the size and disposition of the other force had been ascertained through careful reconnaissance.

Thus we can see from the *Gesta* that strength, courage and cunning were deemed to be the necessary attributes of a soldier, but are there any qualities that should be shunned? One aspect of human behaviour that William illustrates as worthless is the sin of pride. In his hands the Byzantine general Exaugustus was made to deliver a highly bombastic speech to boost the moral of his troops, recalling the unsurpassed military heritage of the Greeks. The arrogance of his tone was subsequently repaid by his being led captive bound into Benevento as part of a Triumph.<sup>23</sup> The Germans who mocked their Norman enemies at Civitate because of their smaller size and refused to listen to their embassies of peace were slaughtered to a man by the combined forces of the Norman army following the rout of the Italian contingent.<sup>24</sup> In a rare direct and personal statement William declared that such arrogance is misplaced: “But not by numbers, nor horses, nor race, nor arms, but to whom by heaven it is given, is victory in war.”<sup>25</sup> Ultimately it was more appropriate for a soldier to be humble, for it was God, not man, who decided the outcome of every conflict.

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<sup>21</sup>WA, II, lines 502 - 515, pages 158 - 160.

<sup>22</sup>‘*Is licet egregios equites sibi sciret adesse,  
Nil ineundo tamen temerarius esse volebat.*’ WA, IV, lines 355 - 356, page 222.

<sup>23</sup>WA, I, lines 393 - 395, page 120.

<sup>24</sup>WA, II, lines 93 -97, page 136; WA, II, lines 253 - 256, page 146.

<sup>25</sup>‘*At non innumero, nec equis, nec gente, nec armis,  
Sed cui de coelo datur, est victoria belli.*’ WA, II, lines 146 - 147, page 140.

Thus far this chapter has considered the patterns of behaviour deemed acceptable both before and during the battle, but the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* also allows a glimpse of the post-conflict rituals of the treatment of the dead. Following his account of the battle of Dyrrakhion William related that

In this battle Constantine, who had previously been stripped of his royal rank, died and was buried with seemly honour. Greece lost many of the noblemen of Dyrrakhion, whose bodies rotted unburied on the battlefield. The Duke was very careful not to remain very long in Alexius' camp near the rotting corpses.<sup>26</sup>

The importance of these lines in the *Gesta* is to draw a contrast between the barbaric practices of the Greeks compared to the 'Norman' army in the treatment of their dead. The 'correct' treatment of the dead is described in the earlier chronicle of Dudo of St Quentin and repeated in the later work of Robert of Torigni. Dudo of St Quentin recorded that following a battle "Rollo buried the dead of his own army, but he left those of the king unburied."<sup>27</sup> It is true that William does not describe how the Normans themselves dealt with their dead at Dyrrakhion, but his audience would have expected the Duke to have recovered the bodies of his men just as Rollo had done, and given them a decent burial. Rollo buried his own men as a mark of respect, the last service perhaps that a lord could render his faithful men - his leaving of the enemy dead was not disrespectful of their courage or status, merely because their burial was the responsibility

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<sup>26</sup>*Occidit hoc bello regni spoliatus honore  
Constantius, et est subhumatus honore decenti.  
Dirachii procures amisit Graecia multos,  
Quorum per campos inhumata cadavera tabent.*

*Dux in Alexinis remorari tempore castris  
Non multo propter putrefacta cadavera curat.* WA, IV, lines 432 - 437, pages 226 - 228.

<sup>27</sup>DsQ, II, 3, page 27. "Then Rollo buried his dead warriors, but left the king's soldiers without burial." WP, II, 2, page 37.

of their lord (and also their kin) and so their bodies were left. What William described therefore was the failure of the Greeks to pay this respect to their dead, for while we should assume that the Normans collected and buried their men, leaving the Greek corpses to be recovered by the Byzantine forces, Alexius did not return to give his men a decent burial and so their bodies 'rotted unburied on the battlefield'. William even stressed that the corpses were not merely the common infantry but Greek noblemen.

One of the most interesting aspects of this particular passage is William's description of the death and burial of Constantine, the brother of Michael VII Ducas. The *Gesta* seems to contrast his burial with honour with the neglect of the other Greek noblemen and in the absence of any other sources it would be logical perhaps to ascertain from this that Constantine fought for Robert in this battle. The *Alexiad* of Anna Comnena however, recorded that

The emperor, like an impregnable tower, stood his ground, though he had lost many of his companions, men distinguished alike for their birth and experience in war. In that battle there died Constantius, the son of the former emperor Constantine Ducas, who was born after his father had ceased to be an ordinary citizen and so came into the world and was brought up in the Porphyra; at the time he was honoured by his father with an imperial diadem.<sup>28</sup>

Anna then names four other Greek nobles who fell in the same battle and so we must assume that Constantine fought for Alexius, not Robert.<sup>29</sup> It seems hard to believe, considering William's emphasis on the neglect of the noblemen of Dyrrakhion, that he

<sup>28</sup>AC, IV, vi, page 148; Leib, I, page 161.

<sup>29</sup>If Robert had had Constantine Ducas on his side then it is unlikely that he would have used a fake Michael VII - the presence of Constantine would have given his campaign all the legitimacy he desired.

chose to record the detail that Alexius buried Constantine 'with seemly honour'. The most logical interpretation of this passage in the *Gesta* is that Robert himself claimed and buried Constantine's corpse. This would be a particularly shrewd (and not disrespectful) move on Robert's part as his whole campaign was based upon the premise that he was fighting to restore Michael VII, the late Constantine's older brother, to the imperial throne. As Michael (or at least an individual pretending to be Michael) was in Robert's camp, the recovery and burial of his brother's body would be a public spectacle that would emphasise to the (still resisting) people of Dyrrakhion the legitimacy of the pseudo-Michael and the Norman Duke's campaign.

So there would seem to be a clear cut code of correct behaviour for soldiers on the field to which William attempts to portray the Normans as adhering. This is not merely true of the larger pitched battles and siege warfare but also in the procedures to be observed in ravaging land. While the *Gesta* frequently describes the Normans as laying waste to places or torching the fields, William is careful not to detail any atrocities inflicted upon the inhabitants - which in the light of his emphasis on their need to reside in well fortified places would seem to be economical with reality. By contrast he details the outrages of the Byzantine general George Maniaces:

Maniaces killed many, and hanging certain men on a tree, he slaughtered others by beheading. The tyrant dared to practice an unheard of kind of slaughter against children, because he buried the body of a captured and still living boy in the ground, his head being visible on the outside. In this way he extinguished many, and he cared to spare none. After these things

Maniaces went to Materra... ..and in a mad disposition he murdered two hundred peasants captured in the fields.<sup>30</sup>

William's following statement gives a clear indication of those whom he believed might be expected to be left unharmed in war: "Neither boy nor little old man, neither monk nor priest was safe from punishment; this evil man gave compassion to none."<sup>31</sup> Maniaces' death in battle was viewed by William as divine retribution for his crimes - the first book ending on a moral note as the Greek general "paid the penalty of his wickedness with his corpse."<sup>32</sup>

Thus there are strong undertones in the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* of the Peace of God, which attempted to regulate which targets were legitimate in warfare. The significance of this for interpreting the *Gesta* is that while the formative stages of this movement had originated in southern France in the late tenth and early eleventh century its development was one of the central planks of Urban II's papacy. Urban introduced the concept to southern Italy at his councils at Melfi in 1089 and Troia in 1093, not only for humanitarian purposes but also as part of his drive to increase stability in the region.<sup>33</sup> Here therefore is further evidence that Urban II was not simply a nominal patron of the *Gesta* and that

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<sup>30</sup>*Intermit multos Maniacus, et arbore quosdam  
Suspensos, alios truncato vertice mactat.  
Caedis inauditum genus exercere tyrannus  
Audet in infantes, viventis adhuc quia capti  
Corpus humo sepelit pueri, caput eminet extra.  
Sic perimit multos, et nulli pacere curat.  
Post haec Matheram...*

*...Maniacus adit; campisque ducentos  
Agricolos captos furibunda mente trucidat.* WA, I, lines 449 - 458, page 122.

<sup>31</sup>*Non puer aut vetulus, non monachus atque sacerdos  
Impunitus erat; nulli miseratur iniquus.* WA, I, lines 459 - 460, pages 122 - 124.

<sup>32</sup>*scelerum persolvit corpore poenas.* WA, I, line 575, page 130.

<sup>33</sup>H.E.J. Cowdrey, 'The peace and the Truce of God in the eleventh century', in *Past and Present XLVI* (1970), pages 61 - 62.



throughout his text William endeavoured to support and emphasise Papal policy, giving here a clear message as to what behaviour was not acceptable in war.

So William's poem on the deeds of Robert Guiscard promotes a clear system of military mores - a code of behaviour expected of those in combat; chivalry. The word, derived from a French term, is not mentioned in the classical Latin verse of the *Gesta*, but that does not preclude the fact that it is the essence of the behavioural system he extols. Those historians whose studies are concerned with chivalry as it appears in later mediaeval and early modern literature might initially be predisposed to question this judgement, but essentially we should not forget that the trappings of correct behaviour at Court and conduct within the machinations of love often viewed by romantics as the heart of the chivalric code are little more than peacetime grafts onto what was essentially and originally a military code of conduct.<sup>34</sup> Maurice Keen, in an attempt to provide a working model for a term which he felt remained "elusive of definition, tonal rather than precise in its origins", observed that:

Chivalry cannot be divorced from the martial world of the mounted warrior: it cannot be divorced from the aristocracy, because knights commonly were men of high lineage: and from the middle of the twelfth century on it very frequently carries ethical or religious overtones.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>The problem of the interference of Arthurian romance in the study of Chivalry has been commented upon by Mathew Strickland. In his introduction to *War and Chivalry* he stated that he had written his book "in an attempt to redress the tendency to divorce, or at least to distance, the study of eleventh - and twelfth-century chivalry from the actualities of warfare. The experience of war, for so long marginalized as merely 'military history', has generally been restricted to analysis of battles and campaigns or to the structure of armies, whilst chivalry and its associated institutions have been studied - with honourable exceptions - primarily as developing social phenomenon." M. Strickland, *War and Chivalry* (Cambridge, 1996), pages 16 - 17.

<sup>35</sup>M. Keen, *Chivalry* (Yale, 1984), page 2.

Whilst Keen's definition clarifies where chivalry might be found, it also obfuscates the issue, predominantly because the eleventh century was a period of flux in some of the criteria he lists: certain groups of warrior elites (including kings) such as the Germans described by William of Apulia, the Varangian Guard and the English did not fight on horseback and mounted warriors (such as the Norman brigands in southern Italy) were not necessarily men of rank, wealth or particularly high status.

Chivalry is often associated with a social elite, a knightly class - but what defines this? John Gillingham, in his study of class differences in late eleventh-century England, observed that boundaries between the differing social levels are often indistinct when compared with earlier or later periods because of the relative decline in the cost of providing men with a hauberk, sword and helmet.<sup>36</sup> The *Gesta*, as has been mentioned in the previous chapter, places a clear emphasis on the role of horsemanship in warfare - an additional cost which perhaps sharpens the distinction between a contemporary 'knight' and common foot soldier. This explains the emphasis in the poem on how dismounted combat was the preferred manner of fighting for the Germans - it was not because they couldn't afford horses! The *Gesta* (in its account of the Battle of Dyrrachium) also clearly brackets mounted warriors and the Normans together as one and the same group - if you rode a horse in battle then you were a Norman. As far as the importance of lineage is concerned with regard to noble status, William's work illustrates quite graphically that in eleventh century Italy there were two aristocracies: the established merit of family background and history, visible in the waning Lombard dynasties of the south; and the new aristocracy of talent, demonstrated by the rise of a predominantly immigrant class of mercenary origin. That this was an aristocracy of opportunity and talent rather than a tight knit and exclusive class based upon an ethnicity determined by origin is expounded

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<sup>36</sup>J. Gillingham, 'Thegns and Knights in Eleventh-Century England: Who was then the gentleman?', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th Series Volume V, 1995, page 136.

by William himself, when he rather unflatteringly commented that "whatever pernicious man of the neighbourhood sought refuge with those men (the Norman mercenaries) they would receive him with rejoicing."<sup>37</sup> What is perhaps significant here is William's stress that these men were then educated in the customs and language of the Normans. Whatever they had been before, they were now part of a distinct social group - distinguished by its language, its culture, and perhaps most importantly, its occupation as professional (and mounted) warriors. While there were clearly differing social levels amongst this new aristocracy, its origins in talent are most clearly shown by the prominence of the Hauteville clan over that of the Grandmesnil family, whose Norman origins were certainly of a higher status. The values that William promoted were not necessarily aimed at 'gentry' as we might understand the term in a later mediaeval context, but certainly at a professional military and land-holding class.<sup>38</sup> The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* outlines clearly how the military class were expected to conduct themselves in battle and the restraint they should exercise against non-combatants. This is not to say that there were no courtly values or mores, nor that they were unimportant. William was commissioned to write his work in a particular style and for a particular purpose, hence his concentration very rarely strays from the field and when it does it is to the council not the court. In this epic poem there is no place for details of either court or courting. These omissions actually prove to be very illuminating, for stripping down the chivalric code in this way, considering purely its military as opposed to courtly aspects, we can gain a different perspective. It is ironic that when we consider the most barbaric elements of

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<sup>37</sup>*Si vicinorum quis perniciosus ad ipsos*

*Confugiebat, eum graterter suscipiebant.* WA, I, lines 165 - 166, page 108.

<sup>38</sup>As a social group it is easy to see the Normans in southern Italy (and in England too - with the exception in both countries of imported clergy) as a professional military caste. By referring to them as a land-holding class the distinction should be made that actual ownership was a position available only to the upper strata, but even the lowest elements would still be distinguishable from other social groups by their sole occupation as warriors and proximity to the more wealthy Normans. As John Gillingham has observed, "even if some *milites* were not richer than farmers, they none the less lived in much closer association with their lords than did farmers, and they therefore belonged to a different social group." J. Gillingham, *Op. Cit.*, page 135.

chivalric behaviour, the mores of the battlefield, it is possible to see the hand of the Church in the formation of western society far more clearly. For if we discard the ancient (and certainly independent of religious orientation) martial values of prowess and courage then the framework that remains for the military class to operate in is little more than the Peace of God.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>The close parallel between the ideal criteria of behaviour on the battlefield as extolled in mediaeval literature and the spirit behind the Peace of God is hardly surprising if the authorship of our surviving sources is considered. As Strickland observes, "while there is an abundance of Latin chronicles and other ecclesiastically produced material... the limited extent of literacy in a predominantly oral lay culture has resulted in a relative paucity of sources emanating from a secular milieu... one is forced to a disproportionate extent to approach the actions and mentality of a warrior nobility through the distorting lens of clerical writers." M. Strickland, *Op. Cit.*, pages 7 - 8.

## Good Lordship

Our duke (that is, Rollo, also known as Robert), continually worn down by the excessive toil of warfare..., and fatigued with the wasting of his strength by illness, and indeed, consumed by protracted decay at an advanced age, is not strong enough to 'aid and protect' himself and us from another's kingdom, and confidently 'preside over and profit' us. We would enquire from him whom he would choose as his heir to the kingdom he has won in battles, and whom he would present to us as suitable. For he has a son, begotten from a most noble lineage of the Franks, who is both supremely well-formed, with a vigorous healthy body, and extremely knowledgeable in mind, after being educated through the study of many subjects.<sup>40</sup>

These words, ascribed to the dying Rollo's men by Dudo of St Quentin, give a clear indication of the perception of the obligations of a ruler in Normandy at the turn of the eleventh century. The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* relates the evolution of the authority of the Normans in Southern Italy, beginning roughly a quarter of a century later, and the subsequent career of Robert Guiscard rather than the mechanics of government itself, but traces of William's views on the attributes of a good ruler may still be gleaned from his poem as it unfolds. All of William's praiseworthy rulers had to be good soldiers, a state of affairs indicative of the troubled nature of eleventh-century society. The slightly earlier

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<sup>40</sup>DsQ, III, 37, page 59.

chronicle of William of Poitiers, comparing Julius Caesar and William the Conqueror, stressed the importance of active participation in battle for the personal honour and reputation of a general:

To Caesar it was sufficient for his glory and his interest to fight with the Britons or Gauls by commanding, indeed he rarely fought with his own hand. This was the normal custom of the generals of the ancients, as attested in the eloquent language of the *Commentaries*, which Caesar himself composed. But to William it seemed dishonourable and of little use, in that battle in which he crushed the English, to carry out the duties of a general unless he also carried out those of a soldier, as had been his custom in other wars. For in every battle in which he was present he was accustomed to be the first, or among the first, to fight with his sword.<sup>41</sup>

Unlike the Byzantine Emperors, who dispatched ineffective generals in their attempts to safeguard their holdings on the peninsula, the Hauteville brothers (like Duke William) defended their interests in person, and ably took the field. In Book Three the importance of this is stressed once more by the comparison made between the soldier emperor Romanus IV Diogenes and the indolent sons of Constantine X Ducas who were "anxious to follow idle lives by neglecting wars."<sup>42</sup> William had no qualms with the setting aside of Michael VII Ducas and his brother Constantine from government in favour of the Byzantine general because they were clearly neither able to 'aid and protect' the Byzantine Empire nor 'preside over and profit it'. Romanus, their successor, was esteemed by William, despite his race,<sup>43</sup> for personally taking the field against his enemies and indeed

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<sup>41</sup>WP, II, 40, pages 172 - 173.

<sup>42</sup>'...*quia bellis otia semper  
Postpositis studuere sequi.*' WA, III, lines 4 - 5, page 164.

<sup>43</sup>See above for William's opinions of the Greek race.

fighting until injury resulted in his capture at Mantzikert.<sup>44</sup> Thus William saw one of the first and foremost duties of a ruler to be the protection of his people, and his scorn for Michael VII and his brother and praise for Romanus illustrates his belief that this was a duty that should be endorsed in person.<sup>45</sup>

One of the most central ancillaries to good government was the exercise of mercy. Throughout the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* William drew attention to the treatment of defeated enemies at the hands of various rulers. The Byzantine Emperor, Romanus IV Diogenes, declared that had he been victorious at Mantzikert he would have killed his enemy, but the Seljuq Sultan, Alp Arslan, replied that "he would never suffer a like villainy to him, but henceforth wished to enjoy the peace of perpetuity with him."<sup>46</sup> These may indeed be Alp Arslan's exact words and sentiments, and indeed William's account echoes those of the Greek historians Skylitzes and Attaliates, but William elected to relate them and this event in his *Gesta*, and in particular chose to describe the execution of a defeated enemy as 'villainy' - for as is suggested by Alp Arslan's conduct, the true purpose of warfare is to bring an enemy to terms, not to destroy him. William also related the story of Romanus' deposition and blinding and in his account we can see a twofold message. Firstly that the usurpation of power from a rightfully appointed ruler is wrong and this was the reason that the "despotic rule" of Michael VII and his brother "did not stand altogether unavenged" for William implied that the invasion of the Seljuqs into the Byzantine empire

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<sup>44</sup>WA, III, lines 1 - 110, pages 164 - 170.

<sup>45</sup>William wrote this section of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* at the same time as the First Crusade, which is referred to in Book Three. His particular emphasis on the unspoken duty of a lord to assist his subjects in person may give us an insight into the role that Crusaders may have expected Alexius I Comnenus to play in the Crusade - a role highlighted by his appearances at Nicaea and Philomelion and the consequences of his absence in the retention of the major cities of Antioch and Jerusalem.

<sup>46</sup>'Ille refert facinus numquam sibi tale patrandum,  
Sed secum posthac fruiturum pace perhenni.' WA, III, lines 63 - 64, page 166.



was a punishment for their actions.<sup>47</sup> That Michael VII was in many respects the most legitimate heir to Constantine X did not seem as important to William as the fact that Romanus was (in his view) a capable ruler, actively defending his subjects while Michael was more content to live in luxury in Constantinople. Secondly he emphasised that those who were responsible for the actual blinding of Romanus lost favour and were “punished as criminals with manifold torments.”<sup>48</sup> As has been seen above, Robert Guiscard was portrayed as merciful following his capture of a monastic settlement and after the capitulation of Bari he “restored that which had been ruined. He himself inflicted nothing on the citizens, nor did he allow others to inflict trouble on those men.”<sup>49</sup> Even the Muslims of Palermo were treated mercifully by the conquering general, who “took care to outlaw no-one and respected the word of his promise, striving to harm none of those men, although he regarded them as Gentiles.”<sup>50</sup> This emphasis on being merciful to one’s enemies was not promoted by William as for the salvation of the soul, but rather such mercy was seen as necessary political expediency for a ruler; “the most gentle Duke sent the enemy away unpunished, because with these kindly feelings he would be reconciled to them.”<sup>51</sup>

The treatment of defeated enemies does raise once more the question as to whether William was outlining a chivalric code of behaviour. The difference between the fate that the English suffered at Hastings in 1066 and that which the Normans might have

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<sup>47</sup>WA, III, lines 94 - 99, page 168. In some respects the one was a consequence of the other as the Byzantine loss of control of the pass onto the Anatolian plain at Mantzikert opened up some of their richest lands to the Seljuqs.

<sup>48</sup>*His, quibus insontem puniri consuluerunt*

*Puniri sontes vario cruciamine mandant.* WA, III, lines 109 - 110, page 170.

<sup>49</sup>*Perdita restituit; nil civibus intulit ipse,*

*Nil alios permisit eis inferre molestum.* WA, III, lines 154 - 155, page 172.

<sup>50</sup>*...Nullum proscibere curat,*

*Observansque fidem promissi, laedere nullum,*

*Quamvis gentiles essent, molitur eorum.* WA, III, lines 328 - 330, page 182.

<sup>51</sup>*Sic impunitos quia dux placidissimus hostes*

*Dimittebat, eis ut amantibus ipse placebat.* WA, III, lines 346 - 347, page 182.

expected had they been defeated has been the subject of some discussion. In the aftermath of a battle in northern France a 'noble' might expect to have life and limb preserved.<sup>52</sup> This practice may be seen in the *Gesta*, but only with the qualification that Robert and his predecessors would only spare their equals. For example, as has been mentioned above, the Greek general Exaugustus was spared following his defeat and led away captive, and Robert never harmed his nephew Abelard or his fellow immigrants Amicus and his son Peter of Andria despite their many revolts. But what of the 'native Italian' nobles who took the field against the Normans with the Greeks at Olivento or with the Germans at Civitate? In both instances the Normans seem to have indulged in a mass slaughter - there is no mention of the taking of prisoners or hostages; these foreign peoples were not deemed worthy of such quarter. Unless they escaped from the wholesale slaughter of their men we should imagine them to have either been cut down in battle or flight, or drowned at Olivento amongst the men chased into the river. There were of course other factors at play in the fate of the German contingent at Civitate who were slaughtered to a man. William expressly recorded that the Germans had mocked not only the Normans' military prowess but also their physical forms prior to the battle. Such provocations were no doubt common, but as Matthew Strickland has observed, this did not preclude a violent retaliation, such as Duke William's response to remarks made about his parentage at Alençon in 1051.<sup>53</sup> The Normans may have deliberately chosen not to take any German prisoners. On the other hand the Germanic tradition, exemplified in *The Battle of Maldon*, of not leaving the field following the death of one's lord might also explain the loss of the entire contingent.<sup>54</sup> Whatever the case, it would seem that honour was responsible for the death of so many German warriors.

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<sup>52</sup>J. Gillingham, *Op. Cit.*, 129 - 153.

<sup>53</sup>M. Strickland, *Op. Cit.*, pages 160 - 161.

<sup>54</sup>*Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader in prose and verse*, 15th Edition, ed., D. Whitelock (Oxford, 1967), pages 116 - 126.

The Norman rulers of Southern Italy were not always at war, although a reading of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* might lead one to believe otherwise. William's epitaph for Robert Guiscard's elder brother Humphrey de Hauteville (Count of Apulia, 1051 - 1057) gives an indication of the qualities that he felt should be aspired to in peacetime:

It is said he took pains not to plague the people with despotic rule; and worshipping justice - which he did not wish to offend - forbore to punish many crimes.<sup>55</sup>

It is unfortunate that William did not detail which crimes benefited from the merciful blind eye of Humphrey for this laudatory discourse on the reign of the dead man would seem at first glance to be quite generous and forgetful of Humphrey's severe reaction to the assassination of his brother Drogo:

Count Humphrey punished all those who had taken part in that deadly plan; these he dismembered, those he pierced through, many he hanged.

In memory to the death of Drogo, he wished to spare no-one.<sup>56</sup>

Of course Humphrey's actions here and William's acceptance of them are a reminder that to murder one's lord was a terrible crime which deserved harsh measures. Count Humphrey's actions were as much due to enforcing a lesson as revenging his brother. William curiously omitted the detail that Drogo was murdered unarmed in a church -

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<sup>55</sup>'*Non studuit populum vexare tyrannide dira;  
Iusticiamque colens, quam laedere, parcere multis  
Maluit offensis.*' WA, II, lines 377 - 379, page 152.

<sup>56</sup>'*Tunc comes Unfredus fraterni funeris ultor,  
Funestro cunctos fuerant qui participati  
Consilio punit; hos truncat, perfodit illos,  
Multos suspendit; memorata morte Drogonis,  
Parcere vult nulli.*' WA, II, lines 287 - 291, page 148.

where he should have had sanctuary. Perhaps this violation of holy ground was so shocking that William did not wish to remind potential troublemakers of how vulnerable usually well protected men were to attack once they discarded their weapons in the presence of God? A similar lack of mercy can be seen in Roger Borsa's harsh response to the citizens of Trani who rebelled against his authority in his father's absence, forcing him to take refuge in the citadel until relieved:

Leaving the citadel he furiously cast down the rebellious people, punishing them with diverse tortures. He had one man's hand cut off, and another's foot, a third lost his nose, another lost his testicles; he deprived some men of their teeth and others of their ears.<sup>57</sup>

Such harshness seems very different to the mercy commented on above, but in fact the cases are quite different. Both Humphrey and Roger were punishing people previously subject to their authority who have rebelled whereas Robert was extending the hand of 'friendship' to new vassals who have just lost their previous independence and subjected themselves to his authority for the first time. Although in all the instances recorded there had been armed opposition to Hauteville authority, the procedures for restoring authority and establishing authority were quite different. It is interesting that William does not mention exactly who Humphrey and Roger were punishing in such extreme ways. The fact that these men remain nameless might indicate that they were not of northern European origin, but instead remnants of the earlier 'native' aristocracies (either Greek or Lombard) or men of insignificant social status.<sup>58</sup> These were not purely racist reprisals for

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<sup>57</sup>*Dismissa ruit arce furens, populumque rebellem*

*Diversis punit cruciatibus. Huic manus, illi*

*Pes erat abscisus; hunc naso, testibus illum*

*Privat; dentibus hos, deformat et auribus illos.* WA, IV, lines 514 - 517, page 232.

<sup>58</sup>While it is possible that these were men of lower social status, it seems unlikely that such mutilations would prove a deterrent to the aristocracy, hence it is more likely that these atrocities were visited upon men of more noble rank.

the conventions of the north, outlined clearly by Strickland in his recent book on Chivalry, licensed such harsh reciprocation.<sup>59</sup> In northern Europe the widespread ties between noble families ensured that clemency was often granted to offenders and it is probable that in southern Italy, where ties of kinship were just as strong if not stronger, and where the ruling class represented an ethnic and cultural minority, some form of solidarity against the locals ensured that such mutilations were rarely inflicted upon the new aristocracy.

Thus far we have seen examples of how a lord might be expected to 'aid and protect' his subjects, but does William give any examples of how a ruler should 'preside over and protect' those under his patronage? One of the more obvious aspects of presiding over subjects was, as has been discussed above, the administering of justice, in which a good Christian ruler should temper punishment with mercy. But there was far more to the exercise of government than the wielding of the sword and the sceptre. William noted of the young Robert Guiscard that:

because that which he (Robert) was able to take he shared to all equally, everyone was loved by him, and he himself was loved by all... ...he took pains that no one had been regarded as a master more affable or humble than he.<sup>60</sup>

At face value this would appear to be a reminder of the necessity for the appearance of generosity, but Robert was not giving what he *had* but what *he was able to take*. The wealth

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<sup>59</sup>Strickland, *Op. Cit.*, pages 240 - 257.

<sup>60</sup>'*Quodque capi poterat dum dividit omnibus aequè,*

*Omnes sunt cari sibi, carus et omnibus ipse...*

*...Ille capessundae cupidus telluris, amorem*

*Omnibus ostentat; non plus affabilis illo*

*Aut humilis quisquam studuit dominator haberi.'* WA, II, lines 312 - 313, lines 320 - 322, page 148.

that the young Robert was sharing was plunder from the Calabrian lands conceded to him by his brother, and so it would seem unlikely that this exchange of love was between Robert and his subjects, but instead between those whose interests William represented - Robert's knights. William was not espousing principles of good government, but good lordship. Robert's obligations of good lordship are echoed by William when the Lombard Argyro addressed those who requested his overlordship:

Since there is no opportunity of money from me, I am amazed that your people wants me to preside over them, for what am I able to give to the people I have power over? For I know you have need of various things; since I cannot give these, I shall be unhappy not to be able to give.<sup>61</sup>

It is clear from Argyro's speech that a good lord was expected to provide for his vassals generously. As with Robert Guiscard it is equally probable that this generosity was solely to those electing him as leader, the new aristocracy, rather than the populace as a whole. Even though as a monk William may have been keen to promote the welfare of 'those who work' and 'those who pray' through criticism of those who broke the peace of God - he could not ignore the fact that one of the characteristics that distinguished a successful patron was generosity to his vassals. In essence those who Robert and his successors should have been concerned with aiding, protecting and preserving were not the common populace of the southern Italian lands but their Norman (and Lombard or Greek where appropriate) overlords. Thus William's 'everyone' and 'all' form but a small proportion of the population from which, judging by his education and movement from Apulia to

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<sup>61</sup>...*Pretii cum nulla facultas  
Sit mihi, quo possim populum donare potentem,  
Cur populus vester me vult sibi praeferre, miror.  
Vos etenim novi diversis rebus egere;  
Quas cum non dedero, me non dare posse dolebo.* WA, I, lines 430 - 434, page 122.



France, he probably originated himself. It is in this light that we should view his thinly disguised racial prejudice when he criticises Drogo de Hauteville who was slain "by the natives because he trusted those men too much."<sup>62</sup> William, like his ancestors who built their first camp in the marshes for protection from the indigenous population of Apulia, considered the local peasantry untrustworthy.

But while William illustrated the importance of leadership in the field of battle and generosity to vassals he gave little outline of the mechanics of peaceful governing itself. To a large extent this allowed him to gloss over the infighting amongst the new aristocracy for pre-eminence on the peninsula, but it also reflects the fact that in the main the newcomers were enforcing rather than exercising power. As has been mentioned above there is no real indication in the *Gesta* of a court to which claims may be addressed or from which government was dispensed and essentially William portrays Drogo, Humphrey and Robert as warlords. While this depiction sits well with the epic motif chosen, the turbulent nature of southern Italy (with the external pressures of the two empires and the Papacy as well as the internal tensions between the Lombards and the Normans as well as amongst the newcomers themselves) meant that it was probably not far from the truth: conquest and war of attrition were probably the priorities for those two Hauteville brothers and for much of Robert's reign as well. It is easy to see the warlord in Robert through William's portrayal of his actions. How often is Robert Guiscard portrayed as drawing his council together to heed their advice before acting? Unlike William of Normandy depicted in the accounts of William of Poitiers or Orderic Vitalis, Robert is never shown as holding or taking council. Perhaps the reason for this is that by supplanting the existing rulers the Normans created their own framework of

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<sup>62</sup> 'Alter ab indigenis, nimium quia credulus illis, Montilari caesus.' WA, II, lines 78 - 79, page 136.



government at the top.<sup>63</sup> William of Normandy's legitimacy may have been questioned, but the framework in which he had to operate was already fixed. While the Normans took over existing institutions, the new aristocracy in southern Italy had a degree more freedom than their northern cousins. When relating the exploits of the first Norman settlers William indicated that councils were a regular occurrence: the first twelve counts were elected from amongst the settlers, as Rainulf had been chosen before them. It is unlikely that the Hautevilles did not take council, but what is possible is that William omits this deliberately to bolster the image of their authority, crossing the boundary from elected lord to ruler by right. Thus Robert Guiscard did not take council before deciding to invade the Balkans, but instead issued decrees that his vassals must obey. William has often been used as evidence that the Balkan expedition of Robert was not popular, for he recorded that

The Duke, wishing to cross the sea, instructed weapons to be prepared and ordered his soldiers to await him at Otranto. He had ships fitted out while he himself stayed at Salerno, demanding gifts and contributions everywhere and unceasingly sending letters here and there. He instructed his trusted troops to go with him on the ships that had been prepared. To many the journey seemed unusual and harsh, principally to those who had wives and beloved children at home; they were reluctant to fight such a war. But the Duke reinforced his mild requests with threatening words and forced many to go. Everyone gathered together, as he had ordered, at Otranto.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Although as Graham Loud has observed they naturally adopted and utilised existing systems of taxation and bureaucracy. G. Loud, 'Byzantine Italy and the Normans' in *Byzantinische Forschungen* 13, (Amsterdam, 1988), pages 215 - 233.

<sup>64</sup>*Dux transire volens mare praecipit arma parari,  
Militibusque suis se praestolentur Idrunthi  
Imperat; aptari naves facit; ipse Salerni,  
Undique dona petens et supplementa, moratur,*

This passage shows that Robert's request was not universally popular, and reading between the lines we may surmise that he was counselled against it. The image here is of Robert the warlord, ordering rather than asking, requisitioning supplies rather than taxing. What is more important is that William is illustrating that the Duke's vassals did what he told them to do, even if they didn't like it. These lines show the Duke's vassals acting on a policy they dislike, one which imposes the greatest hardship of separation from family and children, because of their respect for Robert's authority. Here, more than anywhere else in the *Gesta* is a message of how a vassal should behave towards his lord.

As shown above, William while outlining what was expected of people usually illustrated the penalties for failure to meet the demanding standards of the day. His portrayal of the requirements of good lordship would therefore not be complete without an example of the penalties for a lord failing his vassals. This is graphically shown within the *Gesta* through the actions of a Venetian nobleman at the siege of Dyrrakhion:

A certain man of Dyrrakhion, whom the land Venice had sent, was a noble man called Dominico. He hated another man, because he was not allowed to be part of his council - which he allowed to many associates. That people took pains to regard him as if he were their leader and he was said to be the son of the Doge of Venice. Dominico sought to deprive him of his command. He summoned one of the deserters from Bari, who

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*Huc illuc apices non cessans mittere; secum  
Navibus ornatis fidas monet ire cohortes.  
Insolitum multis iter illud et acre videtur;  
Praecipue quibus uxores et pignora cara  
In domibus fuerant, non exercere volebant  
Militiam talem; sed verba minantia blandis  
Dux addens precibus, multos properare coegit.  
Conveniunt omnes, sicut mandatur, Hidronti.' WA, IV, lines 122 - 133, page 210.*

was dear to him and in whose steady faith he trusted, instructing him to go to Robert's camp by night and inform the Duke that he wished to open up favourable conditions to him... ...with the return of the deserter the summoned Venetian met that man and promised an easy surrender of Dyrrakhion.<sup>65</sup>

Dominico and Robert together organised the betrayal of the city of Dyrrakhion, and Robert pledged the hand of his niece to the treacherous Venetian in return for his services.<sup>66</sup> If we are to believe William the Venetian sought an alliance with Robert because he was disgruntled by his exclusion from the council of the son of the Doge of Venice. In this way the leader of the Venetians failed to provide Dominico with good lordship and so the shunned man sought patronage elsewhere. As a result of his oversight the Venetian lord who shunned Dominico lost the city of Dyrrakhion: a powerful lesson indeed.

The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardii* therefore gives a clear message of how a truly noble leader might be expected to live his life: protecting his vassals in person with valour and cunning, and enforcing his authority, yet tempering justice with mercy. The poem however bestows a higher accolade on Robert because it illustrates not only how a ruler

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<sup>65</sup>*Dirachii quidam, quem terra Venetica misit,  
Vir praeclarus erat, nomenque Dominicus illi.  
Oderat hic quandam, quia non se participabat  
Consilio, sociis quod pluribus insinuabat.  
Hunc quasi primatem gens illa studebat habere:  
Dux dicebatur genuisse Veneticus illum.  
Primatu temptat privare Dominicus illum.  
Quendam de profugis Barinum convocat ad se,  
Qui sibi carus erat fideique tenore probatus.  
Hunc monet ut noctu Roberti castra requirat,  
Et se velle duci sua pandere commoda dicat...  
...Accitus profugo redeunte Veneticus illum  
Convenit, et facilem promittit deditionem  
Dirachii.* WA, IV, lines 449 - 465, page 228.

<sup>66</sup>WA, IV, lines 466 - 467, page 228.

should live, but also how he should die. Death could be honourable or dishonourable, a point made by William when he described the Normans at Civitate desiring "that they should die with honour in making war, rather than hunger overpower so many bodies of men with the ruin of dishonourable death."<sup>67</sup> Robert Guiscard's death could be seen as a dishonourable one, for he fell to a fever rather than a sword, yet William raises this fate by ensuring that the Duke was seen as dying in a manner befitting his rank and status. With Robert confined to his bed in his last days, William portrayed him as having his grieving wife and his heir Roger Borsa at his side along with others who we must assume were his senior vassals present on the campaign. The *Gesta* recollected

Who could look with a dry eye on the tears of the people standing by?  
Who could be so unyielding, so iron not to share equally the grief suffered  
by so many? Amongst so many tears, having received the body and blood  
of Christ, the dying man was taken from life, which is so dear.<sup>68</sup>

In this manner William painted a picture of the great noble, humbled by disease, dying surrounded by his immediate family and vassals - all honouring him with their lamentation. Of greater importance to this imagery is the *Gesta's* description of Robert as having taken the sacraments just before his death, highlighting his piety and portraying him as at peace before leaving one life for the next.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>...*cuncti magis ut moriantur honeste  
Bellando cupiunt, quam corpora tanta virorum  
Opprimat esuries inhonestae funere mortis.* WA, II, lines 139 - 141, page 138.

<sup>68</sup>*Astantis populi lacrimas quis lumine sicco  
Inspiceret? Quis tam patiens, tam ferreus esset,  
Ut non moestitiam tot passis compateretur?  
Inter tot lacrimas cum corpore sanguine Christi  
Accepto, moriens vita spoliatur amica.* WA, V, lines 328 - 332, page 254.

<sup>69</sup>I have chosen to discuss the importance of the appearance of piety in the section within this chapter on the clerical role models.

## The role of a woman in aristocratic society

The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardii*, as a predominantly military history orientated towards the requirements of its patrons, has little more than a marginal role for women. Despite this the manner in which the brief glimpses of the ten women who appear in the text are presented make it possible to draw conclusions about the position they were expected to take in society.

Marriage, as a union of aristocratic houses rather than loving or lustful couples, was the sun about which the destinies of all of these women revolved. No matter how high the status of the brides mentioned, there is no evidence that any of these women had either choice or power of refusal in their husbands. This lack of control over their own destinies is illustrated most clearly by William's description of the rise of the Byzantine Emperor Romanus IV Diogenes to the imperial dignity:

By decree of the senate, their (Michael VII Ducas and his brother Constantine) mother was married to the distinguished Romanus; Eudocia loving the disposition more than the origin of her husband.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>...quare decreto nupta senatus  
Est equiti egregio Romano mater eorum,  
Pectus amans plus quam genus Eudochia mariti.' WA, III, lines 14 - 16, page 164.

Eudocia may have been empress, but in order for her rule (rather than that of her sons) to be acceptable she had to wed, after which the true reins of government were handed over to her new husband. Unusually William suggested that Eudocia loved her husband, but this seems to be an explanation of the marriage with reference to the difference between the rank and 'class' of the bride and groom. But even Eudocia's affection serves a political need: she loves her husband for who he is (a soldier) rather than where he comes from (a family of less aristocratic status). While affection may have come later the *Gesta* makes it clear that the marriage was a result of the will of the senate rather than Eudocia herself. The simplistic nature of this account and the possibility that it may not be entirely accurate strengthen rather than weaken its value as an indicator of the role to which aristocratic women were expected to conform. Even if this were a completely false version of events and bearing in mind as well that William is describing Byzantine rather than western practices - the most important factor is how he has chosen to portray events for his own audience rather than how the events actually happened.

The use of marriage to legitimise political authority in the Byzantine Empire was also mentioned by William in his account of the marriages of the Empress Zoe:

Michael, who had sent this man Maniaces, having been captured was deprived of sight and thus blinded fled from the citadel. The sisters Zoe and Theodora caused this. The former was the wife of Michael's uncle, whom Michael had succeeded. Since he did not want to share dominion with this woman, he had calculated to disinherit her despite having been forbidden by the senate. He was seized and deprived of sight. Zoe was married to Constantine Monomachus.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>*Interea Michael, qui miserat hunc Maniacum, Captus caecatur, caecatus ab arce fugatur.*

William's account is here a little confusing, but that is hardly surprising considering the way that Zoe was used to legitimise the succession of several emperors. Zoe and Theodora were the sole heirs of Constantine VIII and following his death Zoe, as the elder sister, was married to Romanus III Argyrus to give his rule legitimacy. Following his death she was then married to Michael IV. On Michael's death the late emperor's nephew, as William recorded, attempted to take power without the now ageing Zoe as consort. This proved unacceptable to the Senate and hence Michael V was deposed and blinded. Zoe then married Constantine IX Monomachus who was fortunate to survive her. It is clear that marriage was the legitimising factor in these reigns - the rule of Zoe alone was clearly unacceptable (although Theodora did manage to rule eventually for one year, a detail never mentioned by William) - but she was necessary to provide a semblance of continuity. Michael V recognised the flaw in this - Zoe might provide legitimacy but could never provide an heir - but his attempt to break the mould was punished with deposition. Zoe was a powerful woman, but as all the marriages show she was essentially little more than an important pawn in the political games of men.

The political, as opposed to emotional, nature of these aristocratic marriages can be illustrated most clearly in the fate of one woman: Alberada, the first wife of Robert Guiscard. William recorded that

When the name and dominion of his military talents began to be  
advanced, Robert began to send ambassadors, who bore his words to the

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*Hoc fecere Zoe simul et Theodore sorores.  
Prima fuit patris coniunx Michaelis adusque  
Huius successum; cum qua quia noluit ipse  
Partiri regnum, ratus hanc prohibente senatu  
Exheredandam, privatur lumine captus.  
Est Constantino sociata Zoe Monomacho.*' WA, I, lines 461 - 468, page 124.



noble Gisulf, son of Guaimar, requesting a noble marriage with his sister, because he now had need of a union himself, having rejected his first wife for consanguinity, by whom Boamund was born; a vigorous offspring who would become powerful and distinguished beyond measure.<sup>72</sup>

Alberada, the aunt of Robert's ally Gerard of Buonalbergo was set aside for consanguinity by Guiscard. This detail is also reported without question by Amatus and Malaterra, indicating its validity, and Christine Bonniot recently suggested that it is possible that Alberada was related to Robert's mother and that this was the reason that his half brother Drogo opposed the marriage.<sup>73</sup> The marriage between Robert and Alberada set the seal on a relationship between Guiscard and Gerard with the latter entering his service. The charge of consanguinity may be borne out by the fact that Gerard continued to be Robert's man even after his second marriage, indicated in his role in the government of Southern Italy during the Balkans campaign - but this may also indicate that by the time of Robert's second marriage the family tie was no longer of such great importance to Gerard; he had already prospered from the alliance - and the prominent position of Boamund in the 1080's indicates that Robert was certainly not ashamed of his first union.

The *Gesta* recorded of Robert's second marriage that:

At first Gisulf scorned the injunction of Robert, not because he was able to join his sister to a greater or more noble husband, but because the

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<sup>72</sup>*Cumque potentatus coepisset crescere nomen  
Virtutisque suae, legatos mittere coepit,  
Qui sua deferrent generoso verba Gisulfo  
Guaimarii genito, germanae nobile poscens  
Coniugium, quia coniugo tunc ipse carebat,  
Prima coniuge pro consanguinitate repulsa,  
De qua natus erat Buamondus strenua proles,  
Insignis nimia virtute potensque futurus.* WA, II, lines 416 - 423, page 154.

<sup>73</sup>G.A. Loud, *The Age of Robert Guiscard* (Harlow, 2000), page 114. This argument has not been published by Bonniot but Loud attributes it to her in his work.

Gauls seemed to be a savage, barbarous, awful race of inhuman disposition, and the rejection that had been made of the first wife extended the time before another should be given. At length the Prince assented and entrusted his first sister by birth to you, Duke Robert, as a wife.<sup>74</sup>

William of Apulia here seems to suggest that ethnic arrogance was the reason for Gisulf's hesitation over agreeing to the marriage of his sister to Robert, but this would seem unlikely in the light of his father's agreement of the earlier marriage of Gaitelgrima to Drogo and his uncle's acceptance of William Iron Arm. Following the marriage of Robert Guiscard and Sichelgaita the Prince of Salerno had no qualms over Sichelgaita's younger sister Gaitelgrima (not the one who married Drogo) marrying the Norman Prince Jordan of Capua. Kenneth Wolf took William's statements at face value, and believed that

The image conveyed here is one of a sophisticated, well-established dynasty reluctant to admit into its privileged circles someone of Robert's background no matter how impressive his military credentials might be.<sup>75</sup>

The division that Wolf believed that William was portraying was essentially the foundation for his theory that the author of the *Gesta* was, like Roger Borsa, partially of Lombard descent, and that the *Gesta* was an attempt to portray the Normans as continuators of the Lombard tradition of opposing the Greeks rather than conquerors. This flies in the face

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<sup>74</sup>*Primo Roberti spremit mandata Gisulfus,  
Non quod maiori posset vel nobiliori  
Consociare viro germanam, sed quia Galli  
Esse videbantur gens effera, barbara, dira,  
Mentis inhumanae, primaeque repulsio facta  
Coniugis alterius producit tempora dandae.  
Assentit tandem princeps, natuque priorem  
Tradit in uxorem tibi, dux Roberte, sororem.* WA, II, lines 424 - 431, page 154.

<sup>75</sup>Wolf, page 128.

of both William's opening statement in Book One that it was God's will that the Normans come to Italy to supplant the Greeks and his stress that the Normans played the fickle Lombard princes against each other to gain power. Wolf assumed that William's description of Gisulf's perception of the Normans as a savage race was the propaganda of a more civilised and established people, but might it not have also been Norman propaganda? The Normans deliberately cultivated a reputation for savageness because of the psychological advantage that it gave them over their adversaries and as the previous chapter has shown, William conformed to this. This calculated brutality was described by William's contemporary, Geoffrey Malaterra, in his account over a dispute between the Normans and the Greeks over the distribution of booty. A Norman, holding the Greek envoy's horse

in order that the envoy might have something terrifying to report back to the Greeks about the Normans, struck the horse in the neck with his naked fist, knocking it half lifeless to the ground with one blow.<sup>76</sup>

Though the envoy was given a replacement horse, the unpredictable ferociousness of the attack would have been bound to leave an impression that would have been conveyed to his masters. To the Normans these actions were not mere barbarity, they were the tactics of domination. William's alternative and invented reason for Gisulf's hesitation over Sichelgaita's marriage promotes the Norman myth and far from giving a laudable image of the Lombards, portrays Gisulf as afraid of the Normans.

It is indicative once more of the status and role of women in society that the marriage described above by William was arranged by Robert Guiscard and Gisulf II. If

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<sup>76</sup>M, I, ix, page 12.

Sichelgaita had any input into the decision the *Gesta* does not reveal it. This dependence of women upon their guardians in Lombard society was common and indeed enshrined in law; the *Edictum* of Rothair of 643 AD stating that

No free woman who lives according to the law of the Lombards within the jurisdiction of our realm is permitted to live under her own legal control, that is, to be legally competent, but she ought always to remain under the control of some man or of the king.<sup>77</sup>

The political nature of marriage as a means of cementing alliances or indicating the prestige of a family can be seen in all the unions recorded in the *Gesta*. As has been mentioned above, Robert married Alberada for the connection it gave him to Gerard of Buonalbergo and subsequently Sichelgaita for the prestige and legitimacy a marriage into the Salerno dynasty would give him. No doubt Prince Jordan of Capua married Gisulf's other sister Gaitelgrima for the same reason. Eudocia was made to marry Romanus IV Diogenes in order to give his ascension to power legitimacy. The Empress Zoe before her, as heir of Constantine VIII, had married three times in order to maintain her position. Robert secured connections to the north in France with the marriage of one of his daughters to Hugh II of Este and a second, Sybil, to Ebelus II of Roucy; to the east with the betrothal of another daughter, Helen, to Constantine Porphyrogenitus - the son of the Byzantine Emperor Michael VII Ducas; and to the west with the marriage of his daughter Matilda to Count Ráymon Berenguer II of Barcelona.

The image of aristocratic women that emerges from the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* is one of pawns in the political world of men, but with such a peripheral role given to them

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<sup>77</sup>*Edictum Rothari*, 204, in ed., trans., K.F. Drew, *The Lombard laws* (Philadelphia, 1973), page 92.

in the text can any indication be found as to what the duties of a wife should be? The most obvious, yet perhaps also most easily overlooked duty of a woman that William stresses is obedience to the wishes of her guardian. There is never any suggestion that the two sisters of Gisulf II, or the four daughters of Robert Guiscard might disagree with their chosen unions - submission was not portrayed as a virtue but as a given reality. Indeed, as can be seen in the *Edictum* of Rothair above, for Lombard women this submission was not merely a cultural convention but a legally enforced status. The primary duty of a wife, as opposed to the duties of her relatives upon the commencement of a marriage alliance, was to bear children. The importance of this is stressed, perhaps unconsciously, by William in his account of the divorce of Alberada and the marriage of Sichelgaita. On mentioning Alberada for the first time he immediately informed us that she bore Boamund. No description of Alberada's ancestry is provided by the *Gesta*, nor any indication of Alberada as a person, merely the important fact that she had given Robert a son. In the same vein, after having discussed the arrangement of the marriage of Sichelgaita between Robert Guiscard and Gisulf II, William recorded that "this woman brought forth by him three boys and five girls; the progeny of both sexes would become distinguished."<sup>78</sup> It is not possible to know how genuine William's account of Sichelgaita's grief at Robert's death was, but it is perhaps more important that she is portrayed as making a public display of her loss:

When she recognised that Robert, on whom - being such a fine husband - all her hopes rested, had the fever, she ran swiftly to him, weeping and tearing her clothes. Seeing her husband dying and the extreme end drawing near, tearing her cheeks with her nails and pulling her uncombed

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<sup>78</sup> *Edidit haec pueros sibi tres et quinque puellas, Egregiam sobolem sexus utriusque futuram.* WA, II, lines 442 - 443, page 156.

hair, she cried out "Oh horror! What wretched things have I done, that I could be left so unfortunate?"<sup>79</sup>

A wife was expected to grieve for the loss of her husband and Sichelgaita conforms to this image with her self mutilation and lamentation. William's attention to Sichelgaita's uncombed tresses is not merely incidental detail but an example of mourning attire, evinced elsewhere in Dudo of St Quentin's account of Duke Richard's death where "virgins, widows and wives wept and dishevelled their hair."<sup>80</sup> Sichelgaita's initial exclamation suggests that Robert's health was perceived as her responsibility and thus his illness was either the result of her failure or a divine punishment for some sin that she had committed. It is also possible that her reference to being unfortunate lies not just in the loss of her husband but the concurrent loss of her authority that might follow his death. Her duties as a wife did not cease upon the death of her husband, for it was Sichelgaita rather than Robert's son and heir Roger who took possession of his corpse and responsibility for giving it an honourable burial.<sup>81</sup>

As the passage above shows, Sichelgaita was present with Robert Guiscard for his second expedition to the Balkans, following his return to Italy to quell internal resistance and relieve Gregory VII from the German siege of Rome. Initially she had remained in southern Italy while Robert and Roger set out to rejoin Boamund's army but at some point seems to have rejoined her husband. It is noteworthy that upon the inception of

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<sup>79</sup>*Haec ubi Robertam cognovit febricitare,  
In quo tota sui sita spes erat, utpote tanto  
Coniuge, discissis flens vestibis, acceleratis  
Cursibus accessit; quae defecisse maritum  
Extremosque videns casus instare propinquos,  
Ungue genas lanians, impexos scissa capillos,  
"Proh delor!" exclamat, "quid inibo miserrima, vel quo  
Infelix potero discedere?"* WA, V, lines 295 - 302, page 252.

<sup>80</sup>DsQ, IV, page 172.

<sup>81</sup>WA, V, lines 337 - 342, page 254; WA, V, lines 391 - 403, pages 256 - 258.



this second campaign both Robert, Roger Borsa and Boamund were absent from the peninsula,<sup>82</sup> suggesting that Robert had a fair degree of confidence not only in the stability of his own lands following his suppression of the most recent revolts against his authority, but also that Henry IV was unlikely to interfere further in the south following his flight from Rome. Since Roger Borsa had been left behind the first time we might surmise that he accompanied his father to gain greater military experience. As Sichelgaita subsequently rejoined her husband we cannot attribute her initial absence to unwillingness to go on campaign and it is probable that she remained as a figurehead for Robert's authority in the south, governing in his absence as Roger Borsa had done. This would seem to be an unusual role for a Lombard woman in a Lombard society - but Patricia Skinner has recently put forward the suggestion that Sichelgaita's marriage to a Norman may have allowed her to conform to more northern models of behaviour (in terms of being able to play a more active and masculine role in government) than Lombard codes would normally allow, while at the same time her position within the Salernitan dynasty gave her sufficient legitimacy in the eyes of her Lombard subjects.<sup>83</sup> Skinner suggests that the effect of the Norman conquest of southern Italy "may have been to allow certain women more space politically and economically" and asks the question "did it offer women an alternative system of laws and customs to live by?"<sup>84</sup> This is indeed an interesting question, but curiously the answer to it may lie not so much in the customs of the parvenu Normans as in the traditions of the Lombards themselves and how they perceived the ethnic identity of women and thus their cultural obligations. The possibility of Lombard acceptance of Sichelgaita following foreign practices, shifting identity from Lombard to Norman, can be confirmed in a law of King Liutprand of 731 AD:

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<sup>82</sup>Roger's younger brother Guy, who later entered Byzantine service, was also probably with the army.

<sup>83</sup>P. Skinner, ' "Halt! Be Men!": Sichelgaita of Salerno, Gender and the Norman Conquest of Southern Italy', in *Gender and History*, Volume 12, no. 3 (October 2000) pages 622 - 641.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, page 637.



If a Roman man marries a Lombard woman and acquires her mundium, and if after his death the widow marries another man without the consent of the heirs of her first husband, feud and penalty for illegal intercourse shall not be required; for after she married a Roman man and he acquired her mundium, she became a Roman and the children born of such a marriage shall be Roman and shall live according to the law of their Roman father. Therefore the man who marries her after the death of her first husband ought not to pay compensation for illegal intercourse just as he would not pay it for another Roman woman.<sup>85</sup>

Although the context is slightly different it is simple to exchange Norman for Roman. Thus it is possible to answer Skinner's question - the Norman conquest did allow Lombard women an alternative system of laws and customs to live by because those Lombard women who married Normans were regarded by their Lombard kin as Normans, subject to Norman laws and customs. Clearly in Lombard eyes, while Sichelgaita would always be a Lombard princess, after her marriage she would have legally been defined as Norman and thus no longer subject to Lombard legal restrictions on the authority and actions of women. While Sichelgaita was placed in a position to gain greater freedom from her marriage, the importance of Sichelgaita's bloodline both to Robert and his Lombard subjects was underlined by William:

With a marriage of such great nobility the renowned name of Robert began to be advanced and the people who formerly had been accustomed to serve him by compulsion were presently released from their allegiance

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<sup>85</sup> *Leges Liutprandi*, 127, in Drew, pages 199 - 200.

to the obligations of their ancestor's laws. For the Lombard people knew Italy had been subject to his wife's great-grandfathers and grandfathers.<sup>86</sup>

Sichelgaita's new Norman identity opened up a new world for her since Norman women were allowed to govern alongside their husbands or in their absence. A pertinent example of this is the authority given to Matilda, the wife of William the Conqueror, who governed Normandy during her husband's absences.<sup>87</sup> Matilda never acted alone, and Orderic named her counsellors (on whom no doubt she was expected to rely), but William of Apulia also records that two men in particular were assigned to advise Roger Borsa: Count Robert of Loritello and Gerard of Buonalbergo - no doubt they would have given Sichelgaita counsel as well. The argument against Sichelgaita having such an authoritative role is that she was able to rejoin Robert later on in the course of the second expedition - which she supposedly could not have done had she been governing southern Italy in his stead. But before mentioning Sichelgaita's return to the Balkans William recorded that

His (Robert) son Boamund, sickening, asked that his father allow him to return to the country of Italy, which abounded with many doctors and medicines. The Duke reluctantly allowed him to go, wishing to restore the health of his distinguished offspring. He gave him what was necessary for the journey.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> *Coniugio ducto tam magnae nobilitatis,  
Augeri coepit Roberti nobile nomen,  
Et gens, quae quondam servire coacta solebat,  
Obsequio solvit iam debita iuris aviti.  
Nam proavis et avis subiectam coniugis huius  
Noverat Italiam gens Longobarda fuisse.* WA, II, lines 436 - 441, page 156.

<sup>87</sup> Ordericus Vitalis *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed., trans., M. Chibnall (Oxford, 1969), Volume II, Book IV, pages 208- 209; 210 - 211; 280 - 281.

<sup>88</sup> *Filius aegrotans poscit Buamundus ut ipsum  
Italiae remeare pater permittat ad oras,  
Quae medicis multis medicaminibusque redundat:*

It would seem probable therefore that Boamund returned to southern Italy before Sichelgaita rejoined her husband. In fact it was his return that enabled her to join Robert. While Orderic Vitalis spins an elaborate tale of Sichelgaita poisoning first Boamund and subsequently her husband, there is simply no evidence to support this and as David Douglas has observed, accusations of poisoning were common in Normandy.<sup>89</sup> The accusations of Orderic fulfil the need to explain away the death of a great (and thus physically strong) leader such as Robert Guiscard and the illness of the also physically robust (according to Anna Comnena at least<sup>90</sup>) Boamund. Thus in his hands Sichelgaita is made to enact the role of an evil stepmother, adding a sense of mystery to those events that would have entertained his readership.<sup>91</sup> There is no evidence that Sichelgaita left Italy before Boamund returned to recuperate from his illness.

To the Byzantine Princess Anna Comnena, writing some forty years after William, the participation of Sichelgaita in her husband's campaigns were a curiosity to which she turned her quill with avid imagination. At the start of her account of the Norman campaign in the Balkans Anna first described Robert Guiscard "waiting for his wife Gaita (she went on campaign with her husband and when she donned armour was indeed a formidable sight)"<sup>92</sup> before later relating an interesting tale concerning her participation in the Battle of Dyrrakhion in 1081:

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*Ille licet nolens consensit abire volenti,  
 Tam clarae sobolis cupiens reparare salutem.  
 Danda recessuro dedit.* WA, V, lines 223 - 228, page 248.

<sup>89</sup>D. Douglas, *William the Conqueror* (London, 1964), 408 - 15.

<sup>90</sup>AC, XIII, x, page 422; Leib II, pages 122 - 123.

<sup>91</sup>Marjorie Chibnall has observed that poisoning is common throughout Orderic's work. M. Chibnall, 'Women in Orderic Vitalis', in *Haskins Society Journal*, Volume 2 (1990), page 108.

<sup>92</sup>AC, I, xv, page 66; Leib, I, page 53.

There is a story that Robert's wife Gaita, who used to accompany him on campaign, like another Pallas, if not a second Athena, seeing the runaways and glaring fiercely at them, shouted in a very loud voice: 'How far will ye run? Halt! Be men!' - not quite in those Homeric words, but something very like them in her own dialect. As they continued to run, she grasped a long spear and charged at full gallop against them. It brought them to their senses and they went back to fight.<sup>93</sup>

Though Anna describes Sichelgaita donning armour and wielding a spear we cannot infer that she was implying that Sichelgaita actually fought in the campaign.<sup>94</sup> What is unusual is that Anna portrays Sichelgaita as being outside the safety of the camp, where she would certainly be exposed to danger - hence her horse and armour. Anna seems to revel in Sichelgaita's warlike nature and her (apparently) active role in turning the course of the battle and Patricia Skinner, in a recent discussion of this passage, believed that Anna was reversing the common insult of Greek effeminacy of western authors by having a woman showing the Normans how to fight.<sup>95</sup> While the precise words that Anna chooses for Sichelgaita give weight to Skinner's theory of the Byzantine Princess using her Lombard counterpart to deliver an insult, the Duchess' exhortation of the Normans should not, however, be seen as exceptional in itself. The *Gesta Francorum* gives an account of the role of the southern Italian women in Boamund's entourage at the Battle of Dorylaeum:

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<sup>93</sup>AC, IV, vi, page 147; Leib, I, page 160.

<sup>94</sup>Megan McLaughlin has made the convincing argument that while women such as Sichelgaita "might more appropriately be called 'generals' rather than 'warriors', since it is not clear whether they actually wielded weapons and struck blows on the battle field. It is important to remember that the same might be said of many of the male war-leaders in this period, who were nevertheless recognised by their contemporaries as 'warriors'." We should therefore consider armoured women present on the battlefield as 'warriors' whether they fought or not. M. McLaughlin, 'The woman warrior: gender, warfare and society in medieval Europe' in *Womens Studies* 17 (1990), page 196. This is a fair point, but as I have outlined above, the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* places a strong emphasis on the fact that a 'true' general had to be a warrior, setting a martial example to his men and leading from the front.

<sup>95</sup>P. Skinner, '“Halt! Be Men!”: Sichelgaita of Salerno, Gender and the Norman Conquest of Southern Italy', in *Gender and History*, Volume 12, no. 3, page 623.

The women in our camp were a great help to us that day, for they brought up water for the fighting men to drink, and gallantly encouraged those who were fighting and defending them.<sup>96</sup>

None of these women would have been of the same rank as Sichelgaita, but according to the author they played an active role by bringing up essential supplies to the men protecting them. Sichelgaita cannot therefore be seen as unique in exhorting soldiers to fight harder, but what is exceptional about Anna's account is her situation outside the safety of the camp.

Compared to the Byzantine Princess, William of Apulia would seem to have strong reservations about the presence of a woman on the battlefield. Only one chance remark reveals that Sichelgaita was in some way connected with the battlefield during Robert's campaigns:

In this battle, by chance Robert's wife was wounded by an arrow. Terrified by her wound, and with no hope of assistance, she had almost fallen to the enemy and had wanted to embark on one of the ships, fearing the nearby danger of death. God delivered her, not wishing to embarrass so noble and worthy a lady.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>GF, III, page 19.

<sup>97</sup>*Uxor in hoc bello Roberti forte sagitta  
Quadam laesa fuit. Quae vulnere territa, nullam  
Dum sperabat opem, se pene subegerat hosti:  
Navigio cuius se commendare volebat,  
Instantis metuens vicina pericula lethi.  
Hanc Deus eripuit, fieri ludibria nolens  
Matronae tantae tam nobilis et venerandae.* WA, IV, lines 425 - 431, page 226.

Sichelgaita's injury itself does not suggest that she was outside of the confines of the camp, but his inclusion of the detail that she had almost been taken by the enemy as a result of this clarifies the extent of her exposure to enemy fire. As with Anna there is no suggestion that Sichelgaita was actually fighting in the battle. Unlike Anna's account, Sichelgaita is not portrayed by William as an example to the men nearby; her wound terrifies her and she attempts to flee - an attitude which can be contrasted with that of her son Roger who "wounded in the upper arm stood fighting the enemy, unable to surrender, forgetting his wound."<sup>98</sup> This characterisation of Sichelgaita's presence on the field is a far cry from the account of Anna Comnena: either Anna's romanticism has carried her away or Sichelgaita's actions were so far out of tune with how women were supposed to behave that William deliberately omitted them.

As has been mentioned above it is possible to examine Sichelgaita through both Lombard and Norman mores and it is to these that we must turn in order to clarify the contrast between William and Anna's depictions of Sichelgaita. Lombard women, as has been discussed in a recent article by Ross Balzaretto, were not supposed to engage in any violent activities.<sup>99</sup> A law code of Liutprand from 734 AD states that

we cannot equate the collecting together of women with a breach of the peace with an armed band nor with the sedition of rustics, because these are things that men do, not women; therefore it shall be done concerning such women as provided above. If a woman rushes into a brawl and

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<sup>98</sup>...*ipse lacerto*

*Saucius obstanti stat cedere nescius hosti,*

*Immemor illati sibi vulneris.* WA, V, lines 170 - 172, page 244.

<sup>99</sup>R. Balzaretto, 'Social regulation of female violence in Langobard Italy' in *Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West*, ed., G. Halsall (Boydell Press, 1998), pages 175 - 192.

receives there death or a blow or injury, justice shall be done for her as our predecessor King Rothair provided and adjudged.<sup>100</sup>

As Balzaretti has concluded from this passage, the participation of women in violent activities was not deemed natural, since 'these are things men do, not women' and a measure of how repugnant the notion of women fighting was in Lombard society can be seen in the edict of Rothair referred to above:

If a free woman participates in a brawl where men are struggling, and if she inflicts some blow or injury and perhaps in turn is struck or killed, she shall be valued according to her rank and compensation shall be paid for her as if the deed had been done to a brother of that woman. But the penalty for such injury, for which 900 solidi have been adjudged, shall not be required since she had participated in a struggle in a manner dishonourable for women.<sup>101</sup>

In Lombard society then the participation of women in physical violence was deemed so abominable that they were not even entitled to have penalty paid in the event of injury. Though the cases described above refer to petty violence, Rothair's edicts also make it clear that women were not able to participate in any armed combat either:

A woman is not able to commit breach of courtyard, which is *boberos*, for it is foolish to think that a woman, free or slave, could commit a forceful act with arms as if she were a man.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> *Leges Liutprandi*, 141, in Drew, pages 208 - 209.

<sup>101</sup> *Edictum Rothari*, 378, in Drew, page 127.

<sup>102</sup> *Edictum Rothari*, 278, in Drew, page 108.



It can be demonstrated therefore that Sichelgaita's 'active' role in Robert's campaigns did not stem from her Lombard heritage and that this was probably another area of flexibility she gained in her actions from her marriage to Robert. The participation of north European women in battle may not have been necessarily normal, but as Chibnall has observed in her discussion of the roles of women within Orderic Vitalis, it was not always condemned. Orderic did not seem to find any fault with Sibyl of Tarragona patrolling the walls in her husband's absence wearing a hauberk, or Isabel of Conches riding armed like a knight amongst knights to battle.<sup>103</sup> Chibnall does observe however that Orderic does not actually mention these women fighting, and so they may merely have been present as figureheads to encourage the men. As McLaughlin has observed, the majority of the cases found involving the participation of women in combat in northern sources are the result of emergencies with wives assuming responsibility for their husbands' possessions in his absence, incidences of women who habitually took part in warfare are considerably rarer. The women mentioned by Orderic and Sichelgaita seem to be the last remnants of a dying trend, linked to the importance of the household in the organisation in warfare. The decrease in female involvement in warfare, made the participation of some members of that sex increasingly unusual, which in turn meant that such actions attracted greater censure from the late eleventh century onwards.<sup>104</sup>

William of Apulia's choice of words suggest that he disapproved of Sichelgaita's proximity to danger, placing him within the growing trend of censure described by McLaughlin.<sup>105</sup> Orderic described Sibyl and Isabel carrying themselves as if they were

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<sup>103</sup>M. Chibnall, 'Women in Orderic Vitalis', pages 114 - 115.

<sup>104</sup>M. McLaughlin, 'The woman warrior: gender, warfare and society in medieval Europe' in *Womens Studies* 17 (1990), pages 193 - 209.

<sup>105</sup>Sichelgaita's participation in warfare can perhaps be viewed as both indicative of her personality and Robert Guiscard's cultural background - for while the events described took place in the last quarter of the eleventh century, Robert's attitudes and expectations would have been those of a man raised in

men, which may have made their adoption of a masculine role acceptable, whereas William bestowed no such virtues on Sichelgaita. The strongest indication of his disapproval can be found in one of his rare references to divine intervention, recording that 'God delivered her, not wishing to embarrass so noble and worthy a lady'. The suggestion that death from a wound sustained in battle would be an embarrassing end for a noble lady, indicates that William (who in the absence of any other evidence we must assume voiced the prevalent beliefs of his aristocratic audience) felt that women were not supposed to be present on the field of battle.<sup>106</sup>

So to a certain extent through the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* it is possible to see Sichelgaita as breaking out of the traditional stereotypical model for women, but close examination reveals this to be predominantly the result of her adopting a more Norman role by virtue of her marriage than rebelling against Lombard restrictions on female behaviour *per se*. On the one occasion where the Lombard princess seems to exceed even the Norman norm, becoming injured in battle and almost falling to the enemy, the portrayal is not complimentary and is used to illustrate the unsuitability of women for military tasks. William's portrayal of women, while limited by his subject matter, thus suggests a society where women had to conform to a subservient role dictated by men and from which only the agency of men would allow them to escape.

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Normandy in the 1040s, when female participation was a more natural extension of the domestic organisation of warfare.

<sup>106</sup>While this is a sound conclusion, it should be borne in mind that there is another factor that might make such a death embarrassing. The bow was not normally employed by western noblemen in battle and so it might be deemed embarrassing to be killed by an arrow, a weapon which would be more likely to be employed by those not of noble rank.

## Popes, Priests and Politics

The Papacy is treated with considerable respect by William throughout the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* and in many respects he used his tale to illustrate the breadth and importance of its authority. To William, the Battle of Civitate was the result of Pope Leo IX responding to the pleas of the people of southern Italy. With the exception of the Baresi, who turned to the Byzantine Empire in their hour of need (in fairness they could hardly turn to the Pope as his predecessor, Nicholas II, had already granted authority over their city to the Normans - an act which in itself speaks volumes about how the Papacy viewed Southern Italy), all the peoples of the south looked to the Pope for guidance and thus it was to Leo IX that Argyro and the people of Apulia sent entreaties begging him "to release Italy."<sup>107</sup> William was therefore writing a history in which true authority in southern Italy stemmed from the Papacy rather than either of the two claimant empires. Thus when the Normans wished for legality to be given to their rule it was to the Pope that Robert Guiscard turned, not the emperor in Constantinople. Following the Synod at Melfi in 1059 Robert was formally recognised by Nicholas II and the *Gesta* makes it very clear that it was this ceremony that raised him above his peers and gave his rule legitimacy:

With the Synod having finished, by the suit of many the Pope Nicholas conferred onto Robert the Ducal honour. This man alone of all the counts had been confirmed by law, having been made duke by swearing

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<sup>107</sup>WA, II, line 72, page 136.

the allegiance which is binding of a faithful man to the Pope. Whence Calabria and all the region Apulia was granted to him, and dominion in Latium of the people of that land.<sup>108</sup>

Here William is directly reinforcing Papal authority in the South. This reminder of the Synod of Melfi was not accidental but central to the *Gesta* as a whole. As has been discussed above, William dedicated the *Gesta* to his two patrons: Roger Borsa and Urban II. In 1089 the first papal synod of Urban's pontificate met at Melfi. This meeting and date holds many significant implications for the relationship between the Hautevilles and Urban II. At Melfi Urban confirmed Roger Borsa, Duke Roger and Boamund in their possessions.<sup>109</sup> Here too the Peace and Truce of God were proclaimed for the first time in southern Italy. Carl Erdmann has even suggested that we should look further back than Urban's councils at Piacenza and Clermont to his proclamation of the Peace and Truce at Melfi for the origin of Urban's eventual crusading plans.<sup>110</sup> Whatever the case the Peace and Truce would eventually hold wider implications for the aristocracy and their revival certainly made possible a degree of travelling throughout France and southern Italy

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<sup>108</sup> *Finita sinodo, multorum papa rogatu*

*Robertum donat Nicholaus honore ducali.*

*Hic comitum solus concessio iure ducatus*

*Est papae factus iurando iure fidelis.*

*Unde sibi Calaber concessus et Appulus omnis*

*Est locus, et Latio patriae dominatio gentis.* WA, II, lines 400 - 405, page 154.

<sup>109</sup> Boamund was of course technically a vassal of his half brother Roger Borsa, but the settlement achieved between the two of them earlier that year effectively split Apulia in two, significantly giving the half-Lombard Roger control of western Apulia while Boamund ruled the formerly Greek territories. The meeting with Urban at Melfi and confirmation of the relative authorities of the two brothers seems to have brought stability to the region, for thereafter there is only one recorded instance of any possible irregularity on Boamund's part. When Roger Borsa fell seriously ill towards the end of 1093, rumour of his death spread and a number of his vassals rebelled. Boamund, on the pretext or not of respecting the rights of his brother's heirs, seized Roger's fortresses in Calabria. Once word arrived of his brother's recovery, he hastened to Melfi where he restored the said fortresses to Roger Borsa before accompanying him and Roger of Sicily on a campaign to Rossano to put out the remaining flames of rebellion.

<sup>110</sup> C. Erdmann, *The Origin of the idea of Crusade*, tr., M.W. Baldwin and W. Goffart (Princeton, 1977), pages 323 - 6.

for the pope that would otherwise have been unfeasible, and without which Urban's authority might not have been so widely recognised.

One of the reasons that William was keen to stress Papal authority in Southern Italy was that Urban spent more time there than any other Pope in the second half of the eleventh century. This was due to the continuing trouble between the Papacy and Henry IV and it is no coincidence that while describing Robert Guiscard's support of Gregory VII throughout the investiture dispute there is no ambiguity as to whom the audience was intended to support. William makes it clear that the authority of the 'Roman Kingdom' derives from the Papacy and is the Pope's to bestow and withhold as he pleases: thus in the *Gesta* there is no question of Gregory VII's authority to judge Henry IV "deposed from the kingship."<sup>111</sup> Furthering the Papal cause William stressed that Gregory VII, the father of the "Holy Church to which the whole world is subject"<sup>112</sup> was the true Pope, rather than

Guibert of Ravenna, who rebelling against the rule of the father in wicked manner had presumed to come to the Apostolic throne, and was called Clement by the common people.<sup>113</sup>

By his support of Gregory VII William promoted the legitimacy of the Cluniac reform movement of Gregory VII, whose Cluniac successor he named in his preface as patron.

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<sup>111</sup> '...regno deponi iudicat illum.' WA, IV, line 43, page 206.

<sup>112</sup> 'Ecclesiae sanctae, totus cui subiacet orbis.' WA, IV, line 30, page 204.

<sup>113</sup> '...Ravennatem Guilbertum, qui scelerata  
Mente patri insurgens regnum praesumpsit adire  
Sedis apostolicae, Clemens a plebe vocatus.' WA, IV, lines 560 - 562, page 234.

As the *Gesta* reinforces Papal authority so much it is interesting to examine how William reconciles this portrayal with the relationship that the newcomers in the south had with the Papacy. In keeping with his promotion of Papal authority the *Gesta* also gives a clear indication of how the Pope should be treated. Since Civitate was so central to the establishment of Norman authority in the south there was no way in which the battle with papal forces could be ignored, but William managed to show the Normans in a relatively good light through a careful narration of events. At Civitate the Normans made every attempt to make a peace with Leo IX rather than fight his army and it was the arrogance of the German contingent in refusing these embassies rather than Norman desire to fight the Pope that brought about the actual battle. Recognising that it was wrong to oppose the Pope

With bended knees the Norman people beseeched that man, requesting mercy. The Pope benevolently received those bowed; all together bestowing kisses on his feet. With pious words that man admonished and blessed those men.<sup>114</sup>

William excused the Norman attack on Papal forces by blaming it upon the Germans and then reinforced the pious nature of the Normans with the image of their begging forgiveness for mistreating Leo in this way. The men of Civitate “did not support the Pope properly, afraid that it might be disagreeable to the victorious Normans” by refusing Leo refuge when he fled to the city following the battle.<sup>115</sup> The *Gesta* implies that fear of angering a powerful force (in this case the Normans) should not preclude the honour and

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<sup>114</sup> *Hunc genibus flexis Normannica gens veneratur  
Deposcens veniam. Curvatos papa benigne  
Suscipit; oscula dant pedibus communiter omnes.  
Vocibus ille piis hos admonet ac benedicit.* WA, II, lines 261 - 264, page 146.

<sup>115</sup> *Sed cives papam non exceperere decenter,  
Normannis veriti grave ne victoribus esset.* WA, II, lines 259 - 260, page 146.



protection due to the Papacy. While the actions of the citizens were probably in the Normans' best interests they were condemned as the wrong thing to do. In this manner William asserted that obedience to the Pope was one of the foremost duties of all Christians.

It is through William's account of the relationship between Gregory VII and Robert Guiscard that we can see the most careful distortion of their actual history to produce an account which portrayed Robert as constantly rendering the Pope due respect, while preserving the reputations of both.<sup>116</sup> To a large extent this is achieved by keeping the descriptions of their relations brief: omitting any mention to the first decade of Gregory's pontificate in which Robert was excommunicated twice (in 1074 and 1075).

<sup>117</sup> The omissions of the excommunications would prove both beneficial to Robert's memory and the dignity of the papacy - Robert could be portrayed as a paradigmatically dutiful son of the Church while at the same time the embarrassment that Gregory's actions had, as Graham Loud has observed, "no discernible effect on Guiscard" could be glossed over to the benefit of papal authority.<sup>118</sup> By ignoring papal disapproval of the conflicts within southern Italy in the 1070s and otherwise describing the decade through the medium of the siege of Bari, the fate of the Byzantine Emperor at the Battle of Mantzikert, the betrothal of Robert's daughter to the young Constantine Ducas and the

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<sup>116</sup>Curiously Kenneth Wolf seems to have completely missed William's subtle yet pervading reinterpretation of the relationship between the Normans and the Church in general, and Robert Guiscard and Gregory VII in particular, in his reading of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*. After discussing the relative paucity of religious motifs in the *Gesta* (a theory discussed and rejected above) he noted "nor did William try to shape Robert into a paradigmatic defender of the church as Amatus had done." In fact, through an account which selected and emphasised events with subtle precision, this is *exactly* what William did do. Wolf, page 124.

<sup>117</sup>Gregory VII had experience of the Norman rulers of southern Italy prior to his investiture as Pope. In 1059 he had accompanied Nicholas II to Melfi and he was also at Alexander III's side at Salerno in 1067 where he would have met both Robert Guiscard and Roger of Sicily. H.E.J. Cowdrey, *Gregory VII* (Oxford, 1998), pages 47, 54.

<sup>118</sup>Loud, *The Age of Robert Guiscard* (Harlow, 2000), page 200.



siege of Palermo, William was able to provide full enough details of those years of Robert's life without referring to the papacy.

William's description of Robert and Gregory's relationship begins therefore in 1082, at a time when the Pope desperately needed the Norman Duke's support. One of the clearest indications of how much the *Gesta* was geared towards papal patronage is that far from Gregory asking Robert for help, their meeting is described thus:

because the Duke had besieged the city, the Pope bore him ill will. Robert, so that he might obtain forgiveness for this offence, hastened to the city of the Pope and knelt down and gave his lips to the feet of the Holy Father; he was held up - such a man of strength seemed worthy of this honour - and the Pope began to hold session.<sup>119</sup>

In this manner William reinforced the image of the Duke being subservient to the Pope and gave indication of the reverence with which the papacy should be treated. The *Gesta* does not mention that Gregory only received Robert and honoured him because he desired his support against Henry IV and that Robert only desired reconciliation with Gregory in order to minimise the chances of unrest at home once he had embarked upon his Balkan campaign. In similar vein William, while mentioning the revolts Robert put down on his return from the Balkans, gives more attention to Robert's rescue of Gregory from Rome - thus dignifying the Pope with a level of priority that may have been somewhat different than Robert's own. The *Gesta* records that

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<sup>119</sup>...*Quia dux obsederat urbem,  
Aegre papa tulit. Veniam Robertus ut huius  
Impetret offensae, papae properavit ad urbem,  
Supplicat et pedibus sancti dans oscula patris,  
Suscipitur (tanti persona vigoris honore  
Digna videbatur), considerare papa coegit.*' WA, IV, lines 18 - 23, page 204.

Robert hastened to Rome and stormed the walls of the distinguished city in strength, assisted by a few of Gregory's partisans. Thereupon he burned some houses and violently freed the Pope who had been under siege such a long time. He led him with great honour to Salerno with him.

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This account gives the illusion that it was Gregory's wish to accompany Robert south, but in fact the looting and burning of Guiscard's army had been so severe that even without the presence of Henry's forces the Pope's position in Rome was now untenable.

As Gregory's death in May 1085 came before the Guiscard's own demise it gave William an opportunity both to praise the Pope and reiterate the love and respect that Robert felt for him, once again to the benefit of the memory of both:

It was at this time that Pope Gregory died at Salerno; he was a venerable man, never influenced at any time by people or love of gold. He always set out to protect the straight course of the law. No good things gave his heart joy beyond proper measure, nor did unhappy events render him melancholy. He was the comfort of the sad, the way of light, and the teacher of the honest. he restrained the proud with laws and favoured the humble. He was the terror of the impious, the shield of the virtuous, and scattering the seeds of the Saviour's word never ceased to summon the

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<sup>120</sup> *Robertus Romam properans vi perforat urbis  
Egregiae muros, tamen auxiliantibus ipsi  
Paucis Gregorii fautoribus. Inde quibusdam  
Aedibus exustis, violenter ab obsidione  
Liberat obsessum iam tanto tempore papam.  
Hunc secum magno deducit honore Salernum.* WA, IV, lines 552 - 557, page 234.

faithful people away from vices towards those morals which lead to Heaven. His life was led according to doctrine, and he was not unsteady like the lightness of the reed. The Duke, hearing of the death of such a man, could not repress his tears. He could not have cried more for the death of his father, or his son and wife - even if he had seen both at the extreme end. His grief at his death was great because while he had been allowed to live a great union of love had bound them together. Neither had cast away their love for the other after they had declared a mutual treaty of peace. The Pope was buried in the Church of Saint Matthew and ennobled the city with the great treasure of his body. This city, which the translation of the Apostle Matthew had already made famous, was further enhanced by the vicar's burial there; the Duke would have chosen it in preference to all the other cities if he had been permitted to live.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> *Vir venerabilis hoc in tempore papa Salerni  
Gregorius moritur, quem nec persona nec auri  
Umquam flexit amor; iustum servare rigorem  
Semper proposuit; non cor dare laeta valebant  
Absque modo laetum, nec tristia reddere moestum.  
Solator moesti, lucis via, doctor honesti,  
Legibus arcebat tumidos, humilesque fovebat;  
Terror iniquorum, clipeus fuit ille proborum,  
Atque salutiferi spargendo semina verbi,  
Numquam cessavit populum revocare fidelem  
A vitiis ad eos quibus itur ad aethera mores;  
Vitaque doctrinae non discordare solebat.  
Non fuit instabilis vel arundineae levitatis.  
Dux non se lacrimis audita forte coerces  
Morte viri tanti; non mors patris amplius illum  
Cogeret ad lacrimas, non filius ipse, nec uxor,  
Extremos etsi casus utriusque videret.  
Magnus erat de morte dolor, quia magnus amoris,  
Vivere dum licuit, nexus coniunxerat illos.  
Alter ad alterius numquam discessit amore  
Firmatae quondam post mutua foedera pacis.  
Aecclesia sancti Mathaei papa sepultus  
Nobilitat tanti thesauro corporis urbem.  
Hanc, quia translatus Mathaeus apostolus alti  
Nominis esse facit, meritumque vicarius iste  
Auget ibi positus, prae cunctis urbibus unam  
Dux elegisset, sibi vivere si licuisset.* WA, V, lines 255 - 281, page 250.

The whole passage is 26 lines of hexameter verse in length, of which the first twelve are purely concerned with Gregory himself. To place this in perspective Robert Guiscard does not himself receive a true eulogy within the text. He is honoured by a 21 line speech by his wife, highlighting how important his courage was to his men in the field and how she and her son will suffer without him, but William gives no detailed description of his overall characteristics as he does with Gregory. In some respects this is superfluous, for the *Gesta* itself is superficially Robert's eulogy, but the length at which William details Gregory's virtues and the strength of the relationship between Duke and Pope accords with the linking of Urban and Roger as patrons in the preface and the importance to both men of the promotion and legitimisation of their predecessors.

As has been mentioned above, the 1059 Synod of Melfi plays more than a peripheral role in the *Gesta*, highlighting the legitimacy of Robert's rule while at the same time providing a link between the past and the present due to the confirmation of the Hautevilles by Urban II at Melfi in 1089. But while providing a reminder of the origins of secular authority, William also related some of the details of the synod itself, indicating once again that the *Gesta* was more than simply a vehicle for promoting the authority of the Hautevilles. William reinforced the dignity of the papacy with his record of how many prelates attended the pope, but his choice of material is also important as it not only gives further evidence of the *Gesta's* role for Urban but also an insight into how the clergy were perceived:

That man (Pope Nicholas II) had come to those parts for the purpose of managing ecclesiastical affairs. For truly all the priests, deacons and all the clerics in that region publicly were commonly joined in marriage. A council was held there by the Pope, with the favour of the one hundred

prelates called to the synod by him, he warned the priests and ministers of the altar to be armed with chastity: he told and ordered those men to be betrothed to the Church, since it was not lawful for a priest to be a worshipper of riotous living. Thus with everyone he rooted out from those parts the wives of the priests, threatening deceitful disdainers with anathema.<sup>122</sup>

At first glance these accords seem to give an indication of the difference between the actual practices of the clergy and the religious ideal, hinting at widespread corruption amongst the southern clergy. However a large proportion of the clergy, particularly in Apulia, would more than likely be observing Greek rite and practices where clerical marriage was not forbidden. Thus here we have an example of Nicholas reiterating Latin doctrine to a clergy that evidently was having difficulties becoming reconciled to the different demands of Rome in lands where the dictate of Constantinople had formerly been dominant. Unfortunately William lends little in the way of detail, but this passage remains a tantalising glimpse of the practices of the Church in the south in the 1050s.

The greater significance of William's description of the 1059 synod at Melfi is the link between the passage above and the policies of Urban II. This may be seen in the second and twelfth canons of Urban II's own council at Melfi in 1089:

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<sup>122</sup>...*Hic ecclesiastica propter  
Ad partes illas tractanda negotia venit.  
Namque sacerdotes, levitae, clericus omnis  
Hac regione palam se coniugio sociabant.  
Concilium celebrans ibi papa, faventibus illi  
Praesulibus centum ius ad sinodale vocatis,  
Ferre sacerdotes monet altarisque ministros  
Arma pudicitiae; vocat hos, et praecipit esse  
Aecclesiae sponso, quia non est iure sacerdos  
Luxuriae cultor. Sic extirpavit ab illis  
Partibus uxores omnino presbiterorum,  
Spretore minitans anathemate percutiendos.*' WA, II, lines 388 - 399, pages 152 - 154.

(2) Renewing the teachings of the sacred canons we command that from the time of the subdiaconate it should be permitted to no one to engage in carnal relations. But whoever is caught will risk losing his order.

(12) In addition we remove from every sacred order those who from the subdiaconate wish to have leisure for wives, and we decree that they be without office and benefice of the church. But if, warned by the bishop, they fail to correct themselves, we give permission to the rulers that they subject their women to servitude. But if bishops consent to their depravities, they themselves should be punished by interdiction of office.

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In the light of these two canons a different perspective on William's account of the 1059 Synod of Melfi becomes possible. It is no longer possible to view it as merely a digression, a staging point to give context to the more important papal donation of the ducal title to Robert Guiscard. Instead it is a purposefully included passage, giving a clear message as to what was expected of priests by the papacy. William's choice of material is a deliberate reminder to his audience of the above canons from Urban II's own council in 1089, stressing their precedent in 1059 and at the same time linking the contested papal authority of Urban to the undisputed papacy of Nicholas II. William's reiteration of these canons through the medium of Melfi indicates not only his support of the reform papacy and its war against corrupt practices within the Church, but also his championing of the movement to eliminate certain unacceptable practices in the south - a stance no doubt

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<sup>123</sup>R. Somerville, *Pope Urban II, The Collectio britannia, and the Council of Melfi (1089)* (Oxford, 1996), pages 253, 256, 260 - 2. The translation given is Robert Somerville's.

directed by the wishes of his patrons as much as his own views.<sup>124</sup> There can be little doubt that both Urban II and the Hautevilles intended a certain symbolism in 1089 by repeating the pattern of synod and investiture at Melfi set by Nicholas II and Robert Guiscard in 1059, perhaps gaining a further degree of mystique by shadowing the past so exactly. Understanding this it is possible to gain a greater appreciation of William of Apulia's great poignancy and sense of style in his use of 1059 to provide an echo of the events of 1089.

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<sup>124</sup>Urban's legislation against clerical marriage can be interpreted in various ways. On the one hand the canons sit in the long tradition of legislation made by Leo IX, Nicholas II and Gregory VII: thus these canons are an affirmation of church doctrine and may be included in Urban's first council to stress continuation between pontificates. On the other hand they may reflect the fact that even after over thirty years of papal pressure the Greek (and indeed the corrupt members of the Latin) clergy in the south were still finding it hard to give up their wives, and thus the reiteration of the policy was necessary.



## V

### Later Echoes of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*

#### The *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* of Robert Torigni

Of the two twelfth-century revisions of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* of William of Jumièges, the redaction *F* of Robert Torigni - incorporating and adding to the redaction of his recent predecessor, Orderic Vitalis - is noteworthy for its references to the deeds of the southern Italian contemporaries of Duke William and their successors. Robert's digression on southern Italy tallies with William's work on four occasions: a description of the genealogy of the house of Capua, the marriages of the daughters of Guaimar V of Salerno to Robert Guiscard and Prince Jordan of Capua and the reason for Guiscard's remarriage, a summary of Robert Guiscard's campaigns against Alexius Comnenus and Henry IV, and an etymology of the term 'Norman'. While undoubtedly the close links between Italy and Normandy, illustrated in the emigration of men south and even the movement of churchmen such as Lanfranc and Anselm north, indicate that news of the deeds of the Normans in the South would filter North, there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that Robert of Torigni gained his particular information from the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*.

In the epilogue to the seventh book of the *Gesta Normannorum*, digressing from his account of Duke William's death, Robert makes reference to the Normans in southern Italy, since Robert Guiscard had died but a few years beforehand. Referring to the daughters of the Prince of Salerno he explains that:

A younger sister Gatteclima married Jordan, prince of Capua, son of Richard the elder and father of Richard the younger. Jordan's grandfather was Ranulf, who had been the first leader of the Normans in Apulia and who had also founded the town of Aversa.<sup>1</sup>

The details of the genealogy of the Norman Counts of Aversa and Princes of Capua come directly from William of Apulia, who wrote:

After several years the army of the Gauls, protected by Rainulf as Consul, founded the city of Aversa... ..Richard, who succeeded afterwards, than whom no-one was more bold or more generous, descended from this noble family. He begat Jordan, not small in virtue, thereafter from Jordan came Richard; now a young man, he bears the very worthy powers of a man.<sup>2</sup>

At first glance there is no evidence that Robert gained his information from William, even though their details corroborate exactly. But William wrote in hexameter verse, whereas Robert rendered his account of the southern Italian Normans in prose, and hence we might expect the details to have been reworked slightly. The absolute confirmation that Robert took William as his source is his repetition of the detail that Rainulf founded Aversa. Only William of Apulia records that Rainulf founded Aversa, a fact which

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<sup>1</sup>E.M.C. Van Houts, ed., trans., *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni*, Volume II, Book VII, Chapter 43, pages 190 - 191. Unless otherwise stated the translations given from Elizabeth Van Houts' text are her own.

<sup>2</sup>*Post annos aliquot, Gallorum exercitus urbem  
Condidit Aversam Rannulfo consule tutus...*

...Ricardus  
Qui post successit, quo non animosior ullus,  
Nemo magis largus. Qui non virtute minorem  
Iordanem genuit, Iordanis et inde Ricardum;  
Iamque viro vires condignas fert adolescens.' WA, I, lines 169 - 170, 175 - 179, page 108.

indicates strongly that he was Robert's source for this particular piece of information. This is strengthened by the fact that William was wrong; the town of Aversa was already in existence prior to 1022.<sup>3</sup>

There is further evidence in this excerpt that Robert either had no access to or made no use of alternative southern Italian Chronicles, for he states that Rainulf was the first leader of the Normans, directly contradicting the interpolation of Orderic Vitalis relating the deeds of the Normans in the south which he included in his own work. Orderic ascribes this role to a certain Thurstan and then relates further details about the later Norman leaders, including some details of the career of Robert Guiscard. Orderic Vitalis' source for Thurstan is certainly Amatus of Montecassino or his later redactor Leo of Ostia and other details that he provides may be found in the chronicle of Geoffrey Malaterra.<sup>4</sup> Examining Book VII of Robert's redaction of Orderic's text in greater detail it may be possible to explain this curious lack of correlation. Prior to his own piece on southern Italy Robert made only five interpolations: in chapter 18 he inserted the word *William*, in chapters 20 and 21 he incorporated some genealogical details, he then wrote an additional 22nd Chapter (a digression on the founders of monasteries) but made no further alterations until Chapter 38 (a digression linked to his own monastery at Bec). Thus we can see that the southern Italian digression of Orderic Vitalis in Chapter 30 of Robert's redaction occurs in a large section of the manuscript where no alterations have been made - a gap of sixteen chapters. This suggests strongly that Robert did not pay much attention to this section of the text, for had he done so is it not more likely that he would have interpolated his digression in the epilogue into Orderic's own passage on the

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<sup>3</sup>Mathieu, page 345.

<sup>4</sup>The precise usage of Malaterra and Amatus by Orderic Vitalis has been commented upon by E. van Houts in the footnotes to her edition of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*. OV, II, Book VII, Chapter 30, pages 156 - 159; *Storia de' Normanni di Amato di Montecassino*, ed., V. de Bartholomeis (Rome, 1935), pages 25, 41, 96, 136, 137; M, pages 14, 47, 59 - 60.

Normans of southern Italy and made a decision as to whom, Rainulf or Thurstan, was the first leader of the Normans in southern Italy?

Robert does not merely use William to describe the genealogy of the Capuan Normans but also the linking of the old and new aristocracies through the marriages of the daughters of Guaimar V to Prince Jordan of Capua and Robert, Duke of Apulia. As his digression continued to give a summary of the First Crusade he also made reference in the same passage to the origins of Boamund, Robert's first born son, whose mother Guiscard had to divorce before making such a politically attractive match:

This man (Robert) had been divorced on grounds of consanguinity from his first wife, by whom he had a son called Bohemond, and he had then married Sichelgaita, the eldest daughter of Gaimar, prince of Salerno, with the permission of Gisulf who had succeeded his father. A younger sister Gattelclima married Jordan, prince of Capua... ..By Sichelgaita Robert Guiscard had three sons and five daughters, who were married off so highly that one of them even was betrothed to the emperor of Constantinople.<sup>5</sup>

This passage, as Elizabeth Van Houts has recognised, is taken from a section of William of Apulia's text:

When the name and dominion of his military talents began to be advanced, (Robert) began to send ambassadors, who bore his words to the noble Gisulf, son of Guaimar, requesting a noble marriage with his sister,

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<sup>5</sup>RT, II, Book VII, Chapter 43, pages 190 - 191.

because now he had need of a union himself, having rejected his first wife for consanguinity, by whom Boamund was born; a vigorous offspring who would become powerful and distinguished in courage beyond measure...  
 ...At length the prince assented and entrusted his first sister by birth to you, Duke Robert, as wife. She was called Sichelgaita and the younger Gaitelgrima. Later Gaitelgrima married his nephew Jordan, the Prince of Capua, who compared equally to both the duke and his father in his virtues of spirit and strengths... ...This woman (Sichelgaita) brought forth by him three boys and five girls; the progeny of both sexes would become distinguished.<sup>6</sup>

In this instance the two works are far closer than with Robert's linkage of Rainulf with Aversa, which was also sourced from the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*. Here the relevant facts are reproduced from William in exactly the same order: firstly Robert's divorce on the grounds of consanguinity and mention of Boamund, next the permission for the new marriage to the eldest daughter Sichelgaita coming from Guaimar's heir Gisulf, then Jordan's marriage to Gaitelgrima and finally the details of Sichelgaita's children. Robert interspersed this passage from Book II of the *Gesta* with the relevant genealogy of

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<sup>6</sup>*Cumque potentatus coepisset crescere nomen  
 Virtutisque suae, legatos mittere coepit,  
 Qui sua deferrent generoso verba Gisulfo  
 Guaimarii genito, germanae nobile poscens  
 Coniugium, quia coniugio tunc ipse carebat,  
 Prima coniuge pro consanguinitate repulsa,  
 De qua natus erat Buamondus strenua proles,  
 Insignis nimia virtute potensque futurus...  
 ...Assentit tandem princeps, natuque priorem  
 Tradit in uxorem tibi, dux Roberte, sororem.  
 Gattelcrima minor, haec Sichelgaita vocatur.  
 Nubsit Iordani post Gaitelcrima nepoti,  
 Qui Capuae princeps utriusque ducisque patrisque  
 Virtutes animi virtutibus aequiparavit...  
 ...Edidit haec pueros sibi tres et quinque puellas,  
 Egregiam sobolem sexus utriusque futuram.' WA, II, lines 416 - 423, 430 - 435, 442 - 443, pages 154 - 156.*

Jordan (mentioned above) from Book I of William's text, before concluding the details of Guiscard's offspring with the Byzantine betrothal of Helen, found in the third book.<sup>7</sup> The two passages are so similar that William must have been Robert's direct source.

Robert of Torigni was quick to sum up Guiscard's career as he was far more interested in describing the deeds of his son Boamund on the First Crusade. Despite this the summary of Robert Guiscard's actions, detailing only his campaigns against Alexius I Comnenus and intermittently Henry IV, once again points to the *Gesta* as his source:

This Robert defeated two emperors in one year, Alexius of the Greeks in Greece and Henry of the Romans in Italy. So complete was Henry's rout that, aware of the Duke's fame and rightly trusting neither the Saxon nor the German forces, nor the walls of that city, which is the capital of the world, to protect him, he fled in haste.<sup>8</sup>

When he learned that Robert had made so many preparations, and of the force he was bringing with so many provisions, King Henry fled; terrified of the courage and power of the Duke, already renowned throughout the world... ...Thus two of the masters of the earth were defeated at one time; the King of the Germans and the mighty ruler of the Roman Empire.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>WA, III, lines 501 - 503, pages 190 - 192.

<sup>8</sup>RT, II, Book VII, Chapter 43, pages 190 - 191.

<sup>9</sup>*Robertum tantos ubi novit inisse paratus,  
Et sibi cum tantis inferre paratibus arma,  
Rex fugit Henricus. Ducis hunc audacia terret  
Et virtus totum iam notificata per orbem...*

*...Sic uno tempore victi*

*Sunt terrae domini duo, rex Alemannicus iste,*

*Imperii rector Romani maximus ille.* WA, IV, lines 547 - 550, 566 - 568, page 234.

While the order of the relevant statements is inverted, the two passages correlate on details. Both refer to Henry's fleeing Rome because of the reputation of Robert Guiscard and both describe Henry and Alexius being defeated in the same year. It is this latter point that is significant for Robert Guiscard did not defeat Alexius Comnenus and Henry IV in the same year: he overcame Alexius at Dyrrakhion in 1081 and Henry at Rome in 1084. The details were conflated by William to form a triumphant ending to the fourth book of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*. Robert's mistake of putting the two events in the same year shows that William of Apulia was his source for his description of Robert's wars in the 1080s.

The final correlation between the two texts discussed here is actually the first to occur in the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* of Robert of Torigni. The passage is a short interpolation of Robert's into a discussion of the legendary past of the Normans by William of Jumièges, linking the Danes with survivors of the fall of Troy. Robert's interpolation is an examination of the term 'Norman' which is taken directly from William of Apulia, who was the first author to construct this etymology:

Therefore the Daci called themselves Danai or Danes. They, however, are called Northmen, for in their language 'Boreas' is called 'North' and 'homo' 'man'; thence the men from the north are called 'Northmen'.<sup>10</sup>

Because the wind, which the tongue of their native soil calls 'north', brought these men to the northern shores of the region from which they departed to seek the Latin lands, and because among these men it is

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<sup>10</sup>RT, I, Book I, Chapter 4, pages 16 - 17.



‘man’, which to us is named ‘homo’ amongst us, they are called ‘Normans’,  
that is men of the North wind.<sup>11</sup>

There is thus significant enough textual evidence to show that Robert of Torigni was able to use the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, and indeed had access to at least the first four books. In the case of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* of Robert of Torigni we are fortunate in that it is possible to illustrate the possibility of this by looking at both the surviving manuscript evidence of William’s work and Robert’s career.

The oldest surviving manuscript of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, 162 of the Bibliothèque Municipale d’Avranches (A), dates from the end of the twelfth century and was the property of the abbey of Mont Saint Michel. The next oldest copy of the *Gesta* is the 1582 edition of Jean Tiremois (T) which he copied from a very old and now lost manuscript at the abbey of Bec. As Mathieu has noted, the value of Tiremois’ manuscript is muted somewhat by the fact that it is often impossible to determine between his corrections and the original script, and for that reason in her edition she always gave precedence to the A manuscript in incidences of divergence.<sup>12</sup> The two are sufficiently close however for it to have been possible for Tiremois’ source manuscript to have been either the template or the copy of A.

Robert of Torigni joined the abbey of Bec in 1128. When he was elected abbot of Mont Saint Michel in 1154 he had achieved the rank of prior at Bec. It is possible to date Robert’s redaction of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* as many of his interpolations refer to

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<sup>11</sup> ‘Hos quando ventus, quem lingua soli genialis  
Nort vocat, advexit boreas regionis ad oras  
A qua digressi fines petiere latinis,  
Et man est apud hos, homo quod perhibetur apud nos,  
Normanni dicuntur, id est homines boreales.’ WA, I, lines 6 - 10, page 98.

<sup>12</sup> Mathieu, page 73.

contemporary events, and thus we can be sure that he had begun his work after 1137 and that it seems he made no more corrections after 1159.<sup>13</sup> Thus Robert worked on the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* throughout his career and indeed at both Bec and Mont Saint Michel. This was not Robert's only work, and it is evident that he had several projects which moved with him from one monastery to the other.<sup>14</sup> It is not possible to determine whether Robert first came into contact with William's chronicle at Bec or at Mont Saint Michel. In the former instance, as the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* was clearly one of Robert's resources, we might have expected him to take the copy that he had at Bec with him to Mont Saint Michel and this would explain why the catalogue of the library of Bec from the twelfth century - which runs up to 1164 - does not mention the text.<sup>15</sup> If this were the case then it is possible that the manuscript of Tiremois was the original copy used by Robert, returned to Bec sometime before his death in 1186. There is evidence that Robert, like many modern historians, was particularly bad at returning material: a letter of Robert's as abbot of Mont Saint Michel to the abbot of Bec survives from 1183, concerning the return of a manuscript he had taken from Bec when he moved to Mont Saint Michel - he had held onto it for 29 years!<sup>16</sup> Certainly the dating of the *A* manuscript to the end of the twelfth century lends extra credence to the possibility that it was a copy made towards the end of Robert's life, perhaps when pressure for the return of the original by the abbot of Bec was increasing? A graphological study comparing the *A* text of William with Robert's writing could prove interesting.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>RT, I, page lxxvii - lxxx.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, page lxxviii.

<sup>15</sup>Mathieu believed that Robert must have used the manuscript at Mont Saint Michel and does not seem to have considered the possibility that he may have taken the copy of Bec. Mathieu, page 74.

<sup>16</sup>RT, I, page lxxix.

<sup>17</sup>This is a slightly moot point as even if *A* were a copy of the template for *T*, Robert as abbot would not necessarily have made the copy himself.

## The Deeds of Louis the Fat

Abbott Suger's eulogising biography of Louis the Fat devotes an entire Chapter to the visit of Boamund to the French Court and thus gives a small digression into the Crusading Prince's background in southern Italy. As with Orderic Vitalis' digressions on the south there are a number of details that may have come from oral sources, or that are so general that it is not possible to ascertain the exact written source, but one particular phrase reveals that Suger had probably been exposed to the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*:

Then, on one and the same day, Guiscard the father joined in battle with the emperor at Rome, and Boamund fought valiantly against the emperor of the Greeks. Marvellous to say, each prince triumphed while each emperor suffered defeat.<sup>18</sup>

As Cusimano and Moorhead comment in their endnotes, Suger has made an error here. Boamund defeated Alexius in May 1082 and Robert Guiscard encountered Henry IV in May 1084. Suger's error points tantalisingly to the passage cited above in the fourth book of the *Gesta* which describes the Norman leader as defeating the two emperors at the same time, but the subtle twist is that Suger refers to Boamund's victory over Alexius of 1082 rather than his father's triumph in 1081.

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<sup>18</sup>Suger, IX, pages 44 - 45. The translation is that of Cusimano and Moorhead.

It may be possible to reconcile the differences between William and Suger's narratives. The core similarity, deliberately incorrectly coined by William to emphasise Robert's prowess, is the sense that Alexius and Henry were defeated "at one time". The divergence is that Suger has attributed the eastern victory to Boamund which has allowed him to exaggerate William's twist even further - altering "at one time" to "on one and the same day". The *Gesta* itself provides a clue to why Suger may have changed the eastern victory from the father to the son: William's statement is given in the concluding lines of the fourth book of the *Gesta*, but the fifth book does not maintain continuity and actually jumps back in time to relate Boamund's exploits against Alexius in his father's absence, beginning with the Byzantine defeat at Dyrrakhion in May 1082. Any person who had heard an oral recital of the *Gesta*, a medium to which its hexameter verses are indubitably suited, would have been exposed to the following sequence of 'facts':

Robert besieges Dyrrakhion.

Robert is defeated in a naval battle with the Venetians.

Robert defeats Alexius at Dyrrakhion.

Dyrrakhion falls to Robert through treachery.

Troia and Ascoli revolt against Roger Borsa.

Robert returns home leaving Boamund behind.

Robert destroys Cannes.

Robert drives Henry away from Rome.

Robert and Gregory VII return to Salerno.

At one time both emperors are defeated.

Boamund defeats Alexius at Dyrrakhion.

Boamund loses his camp in a skirmish at Larissa.

Boamund defeats an imperial army at Larissa.

Even if the listener remembered all the details given above, in the correct order, it is not hard to see how the Byzantine defeat referred to by William might be associated with Boamund by mistake, indeed it is a more logical association since it was known that Boamund remained behind to fight Alexius while his father returned to Apulia. Boamund's defeat of Alexius is far closer in the narrative to William's comment than his father's victory over the Byzantine Emperor.<sup>19</sup> Suger's error points clearly to the effects of memory on either an oral transmission, the source of which is identifiable as the *Gesta* by the repetition of William's distinctive and memorable "at one time", or a reading of the (no longer available for reference) poem.<sup>20</sup> The remaining question is how the Abbott of St Denis might have come into contact with the *Gesta*.

The answer to this lies in Suger's devotion of an entire chapter to Boamund. The occasion of Boamund's visit to the French court was to gain support for another expedition to the East and to marry Louis the Fat's sister Constance. As Suger himself indicates, Boamund was by this time an extremely famous man - so famous that his history does not even mention Boamund's participation in the First Crusade! Suger records the marriage and Boamund's campaign to gain manpower for a further Crusading expedition to the East. It is probable that Suger's concentration on Robert and

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<sup>19</sup>The respective proximity in the text of the three relevant battles to William's uniting phrase is as follows:

William refers to the dual victories happening at one time in line 566.

Henry fled in line 549 - 17 lines earlier.

Alexius wept at his defeat by Robert's army in line 420 - 146 lines earlier.

Alexius was defeated by Boamund in line 19 of Book Five - 23 lines later (25 including the titles and end notes of the Books).

<sup>20</sup>In his discussion of the contemporary *Gesta Francorum*, Colin Morris argued that its language was sufficiently close to the vernacular to be widely understood and that levels of Latin literacy amongst the Western nobility were high. Thus a recital of William's classical Latin would not have been an improbable event. Urban II would not have desired the hasty completion of a poem that could not have been widely understood. C. Morris, 'The *Gesta Francorum* as Narrative History', in *Reading Medieval Studies*, Volume XIX (University of Reading, 1993), pages 55 - 71. It is also possible that Suger had a copy of the *Gesta* in front of him when he penned these words, but recognising the inaccuracy of William's chronology of placing Robert's defeat of Alexius and Henry in the same year, substituted the (still incorrect but more accurate) victory of Boamund.

Boamund's campaigns in the 1080's, both East and West, may be linked to Boamund's marriage with Constance. The digression illustrates that Boamund was not a 'one off' - his innate characteristics of leadership and military prowess can be seen to be present in his father, thus they are part of his family's blood line - which is to be joined with the royal bloodline of France. Naturally Suger does not look back further to look at Robert's parentage since Tancred de Hauteville was only a minor Norman baron, here he echoes the *Gesta* by omission, since William was also discrete and did not chose to record the parentage of any of the Hauteville brothers.

This explains the presence of Boamund in Suger's work, but not how a transmission of the *Gesta* may have taken place. The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* is the only work that truly celebrates the greatness of all Hautevilles (or rather all those who migrated south) and their characteristics. No doubt since Boamund was an extremely distinguished figure a wide variety of entertainments would have been provided during his stay with the French Court. For the reasons I have mentioned above, it would not be unreasonable for the *Gesta* to be recited as entertainment - since this would serve several purposes for Boamund: it promotes the nobility of his family, it reminds the audience that his distinguished military career goes beyond the First Crusade and it makes appropriate noises towards crusading with its description of the conquest of Sicily.<sup>21</sup> Suger's account makes it clear that he was present when Boamund spoke exhorting the French nobility to undertake a further Crusading expedition to the East at Poitiers in 1106.<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere he indicates that he was already closely associated with the King designate Louis by 1104.<sup>23</sup> It would seem possible therefore that as a close confident of Louis (they had both spent

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<sup>21</sup>It also reminds his audience that the Greeks were the natural enemies of the Franks. If Boamund was planning to launch a direct campaign against Alexius rather than simply shore up his own and Crusader defences in the Levant against Islamic forces then this would have been a useful idea to sell to the market he was trying to tap.

<sup>22</sup>Suger, IX, page 45.

<sup>23</sup>Suger, VIII, page 40.

their childhood and been educated at the Abbey of St Denis and their proximity then must surely be the explanation for their subsequently close relationship) he may have been present at Constance's wedding as well - either in a personal capacity or as the Abbot's aide (the position he held later that year at Poitiers). The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* would probably have been recited at one or possibly both of those occasions and a copy may have even been presented to the French King as a gift.



## The *Alexiad* of Anna Comnena

The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* and the *Alexiad* of Anna Comnena contain textual similarities which have excited a wide range of historiographical discussion. While an examination of these may seem to have more relevance to the study of Anna Comnena, attempting to establish what, if any, relationship there was between the two texts is important for the insights it may give us into the readership and distribution of William's work. The two earliest manuscripts that survive of the *Gesta* do so in Normandy and yet William's words seem directed at an audience whose concerns, while their cultural origins may have been north European, were predominantly Mediterranean and indeed Hellenic and thus any evidence that his text may have circulated in the East as well as the West deserves consideration. Marguerite Mathieu's edition discussed briefly the parallels between the work of William of Apulia and the later composition of Anna Comnena - dismissing the suggestions of Wilken that Anna had copied William of Apulia and Wilmans' theory that the two relied on a common textual source disguised by Anna as the 'Latin of Bari'.<sup>24</sup> More recently Graham Loud in his discussion of Anna Comnena's knowledge of the West observed that "in almost all significant aspects the two accounts are very close to each other."<sup>25</sup> The most striking resemblances between the two texts (in the order in which they feature in the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*) are the recording of the foreign marriages of two of Robert's daughters, the meeting between Gregory VII and Robert Guiscard at Benevento,<sup>26</sup> the promise of the Roman Kingdom to Robert

<sup>24</sup>Mathieu, page 39.

<sup>25</sup>G.A. Loud, 'Anna Komnena and her Sources for the Normans of Southern Italy' in *Church and Chronicle in the Middle Ages. Essays presented to John Taylor* (1991), pages 47 - 48.

<sup>26</sup>This particular event, placed at Benevento only by William of Apulia and Anna Comnena, was not

(although William merely reports this as rumour), the digression on the origin and name of Dyrrakhion, the ridiculing of the pseudo-Michael by the inhabitants of Dyrrakhion, the substance of their respective accounts of the German wars of Henry IV, the device employed by Robert Guiscard to refloat his ships on the Glykys and the narration of the death and fate of Robert Guiscard.

The first of the textual coincidences is the digression in both sources on the history of Dyrrakhion. The two works are so similar that it is worth here comparing the texts:

Having captured Avlona at the same time and other coastal towns, he laid siege to Dyrrakhion, because he knew it was well fortified. This was once a city of great wealth, principally enclosed by brick walls. The king of the Epirots, Pyrrhus, had ordered this to be called Epidamnus; he had not hesitated to wage a fierce war against the Quirites<sup>27</sup> in alliance with the people of Taranto. Thereafter the city was often at war and suffered other disasters and was deprived of inhabitants and reduced to nothing. After some time Zethos and Amphion rebuilt the destroyed city on a reduced scale and ordered it to be called Dyrrakhion.<sup>28</sup>

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recognised as significant by Mathieu but is discussed by Loud. Loud, *Op. Cit.*, pages 50 - 52. See also below.

<sup>27</sup>The Romans.

<sup>28</sup>*Hinc Avellona simul urbibus atque quibusdam  
Littoreis captis, munitius esse quod audit,  
Dirachium obsedit. Quondam fuit urbs opulenta  
Magnaque praecipue tegulosis obsita muris.  
Rex Epirotarum dicier hanc Epidamnum  
Pyrrhus praecepit, quia fortia ferre Quiritum  
Bella Tarentinis sociatus non dubitavit.  
Inde frequens bellum varios et passa labores  
Evacuata viris fuit ad nihilumque redacta.  
Destructam spatio post composuere minori  
Zetus et Amphion et praecepere vocari  
Dirachium.* WA, IV, 232 - 244, page 216.

They set up huts inside the walls of the ruined city formerly called Epidamnos. It was in this place that Pyrrhus, King of Epirus, once lived.

He joined with the men of Tarentum against the Romans and fought a fierce campaign in Apulia. As a result there was so much carnage that the whole population was put to the sword without exception and the city was left entirely without inhabitants. In later times, however, according to Greek tradition and indeed according to the evidence of carved inscriptions there Amphion and Zethos restored it to its present condition and the name was immediately changed to Dyrrachium.<sup>29</sup>

Both accounts first mention Pyrrhus, King of the Epirots, then refer to his alliance with Taranto against Rome, before describing Epidamnus' depopulation and the otherwise unattested fact that its reconstruction was then ordered by Amphion and Zethos who changed its name to Dyrrakhion. Here we find in both passages four 'facts', presented in the same order, in a pattern not found elsewhere.<sup>30</sup> Mathieu ascribed the textual similarity above to the Latin envoy accompanying Robert with whom Anna says she spoke (unfortunately Anna does not give any indication as to when she met this individual) and both she and Loud suggest that he was probably familiar with William's chronicle. But Anna, writing of her sources in general, professed that she had not spoken to a friend of her father's for over thirty years,<sup>31</sup> and we should also consider how long it must have been since she conversed with the Latin envoy of the Archbishop of Bari - are we to believe that she recorded his words many years prior to writing her history?<sup>32</sup> Studies in

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<sup>29</sup>AC, III, xii, page 133; Leib, I, page 142.

<sup>30</sup>Both accounts are a very succinct summary of Pyrrhus' conflict with Rome.

<sup>31</sup>AC, XIV, vii, page 461; Leib, III, page 175.

<sup>32</sup>Archbishop Ursus was often a witness to Ducal charters, but the last 'active' date we have for him is 1087. L.R. Ménager, *Recueil des actes des ducs Normands d'Italie (1046 - 1127)* (Bari, 1981), nos. 31, 41, 44, 45 - 49, 61 - 62. If this individual was an envoy for Ursus in 1083 then surely the constraints of

oral history have shown that no two individuals will produce identical accounts of events,<sup>33</sup> for their backgrounds and experiences will colour the significance of the various complexities that form the events taking place before and around them, but what if this envoy was both William and Anna's source? Henige observed that "repeated recalling of individual experiences can be compared to the chain of transmission. That is, the most recent time we recall an experience will be different - who knows how much? - from the first time. No matter how careful we may try to be, remembering is just too casual and too unconscious to be adequately controlled. Each time we recall something to mind (or only pass it briefly through our unconscious), modifications occur."<sup>34</sup> Thus the degree of similarity between the two texts, and the time lapse between the event and the composition of the *Alexiad* renders a written source for Anna's digression far more probable.

In asserting that a written source existed for this particular passage I am not, like Wilmans, accusing Anna of lying about her sources. Anna does not attribute the above piece of text to the Latin sent as an envoy by the Archbishop of Bari. The information attributed to this source is that Robert

stayed for a week in Glabinitza to recover his own strength and rest his shipwrecked mariners, but also to give time to the soldiers left behind in Brindisi, and indeed to those whom he was expecting from another quarter, to arrive by sea. He was also waiting for the heavily-armed knights and infantry, together with his light-armed forces, to cross by the over land route (they had started a little before himself). When all contingents,

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age, and indeed what we know of Anna's situation, suggest that she cannot have spoken to him after 1118.

<sup>33</sup>D. Henige, *Oral Historiography* (Longman, 1982), page 111.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*

coming by land or sea, were united, he occupied the Illyrian plain in full force.<sup>35</sup>

The fact that Anna then cites the Latin of Bari as her source for this *before* digressing to talk about the history of Dyrrakhion clearly shows that he was not her source for *that* information - we should look elsewhere.<sup>36</sup>

A textual source for the digression of Anna Comnena on the mythological past of Dyrrakhion suggests one of two things - either a common source for both Anna and William (either in Greek - which there is evidence that William understood<sup>37</sup> - or in Latin) or that somehow Anna may have had access to the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*. Of all of Anna's identifiable sources, only Polybius, from whom she borrowed extensively according to Reifferscheid, makes references to the Pyrrhic war, although he does not record the connection to Dyrrakhion.<sup>38</sup> These passages lack any mention of Zethos and Amphion and their structure differs so extensively from the pattern common to Anna and William that it is not possible that it could have been their common source. The two authors could not independently produce such similar accounts from such a casual source. The survival of both contemporary and subsequent sources for Pyrrhus' reign has,

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<sup>35</sup>AC, III, xii, page 133; Leib, I, page 141. It is possible that the text immediately preceding that given, concerning the storm that Robert's fleet endured, may also be attributed to this oral source.

<sup>36</sup>I would reject outright any suggestion that the root of Anna's digression was merely either the 'Greek tradition' or 'carved inscriptions' that she mentions, primarily on the basis of the closeness in narrative structure between her account and that of William, but also because it is only in the end part of her aside ("...in later times, however, according to Greek tradition...") that she appears to cite these as her origin. Thus while I believe that the extract I have outlined came to Anna in the format she presents it from one source, William, she already knew of the (elsewhere unattested and anachronistic) link between Amphion, Zethos and Dyrrakhion from the traditions and inscriptions she mentions in their context.

<sup>37</sup>WA, I, 87-90, pages 102-104.

<sup>38</sup>"ex Polybio, quem maxime Anna imitatur, cum urbium oppugnationes et proelia describit, integram sententiam I, 14 in praefationem suam 4, 26 - 5, 3 trastulit nomine auctoris celato." A. Reifferscheid, ed., *Anna Comnena Alexias*, (In aedibus B.G. Teubneri, 1884), page XXVII. Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, trans., I. Scott-Kilvert, (Penguin Classics, 1979), pages 46 - 7, 131, 154, 374. Polybius' references are brief and none of his four asides to the conflict are as detailed as those of Anna or William!

unfortunately, been poor.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, as Garoufalios notes, “Latin writers remain more or less the only sources for Pyrrhus’ career.”<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately we can only look in vain to that most thorough of Latin historians, Livy, for an alternative account as these events would rest within his lost books (Eleven to Twenty) and thus we have no way of ascertaining whether he was William’s source or not.<sup>41</sup> Buckler pointed out the anachronism of connecting Amphion and Zethos, the builders of Thebes, with Dyrrakhion and expressed surprise that a writer as educated as Anna could make such a mistake.<sup>42</sup> She suggested that the identity of the real builders may have been concealed behind that of the builders of Thebes and indeed one might suppose that such an association would bring prestige to the locals and be recorded in their oral traditions, if not, as Anna suggests, on the walls themselves. One wonders whether Anna, more acquainted with Greek traditions than William, felt obliged to remain true to her textual source but justified what she knew to be an anachronism by means of citing the inscriptions of the walls as evidence.

The strongest argument against a common source is the nature of the material itself - an historical-mythological digression on the name and origins of Dyrrakhion. The incorporation of mythological and classical history into the narrative is not an isolated event in the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, indeed it can even be said that such references form one of the central reoccurring themes within the text. In Book One the Greek general Exaugustus refers to the murder of Hector by Achilles, the fall of Troy, and the conquests

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<sup>39</sup>Pyrrhus entered into a treaty against Rome with Tarentum in 281 BC, was defeated in 275 BC at the Battle of Beneventum and died in 272 BC. A full discussion of the lost sources for Pyrrhus’ reign can be found in P. Garoufalios, *Pyrrhus, King of Epirus* (London, 1979), pages 153 - 164. Plutarch’s account is easily the fullest remaining Greek record, but Anna may have found his Greek too unpolished for her taste.

<sup>40</sup>Garoufalios, *Op. Cit.*, page 144.

<sup>41</sup>If Livy was William’s source, the evidence of Livy’s other writings and the succinctness of William’s account (plus the fact that he wrote in hexameters) strongly indicates that the eleventh-century writer chose to summarise the classical author.

<sup>42</sup>Buckler, *Anna Comnena* (Oxford, 1929), page 200.



of Philip and Alexander.<sup>43</sup> Later in the same book William linked George Maniaces to the Carthaginian leader Hannibal through their both having camped at Matera.<sup>44</sup> In Book Two Robert Guiscard is compared favourably by William to the Greek Ulysses and the Roman Cicero.<sup>45</sup> In Book Three Robert's fleet passed unharmed through the Scilla and Charybdis in the Straits of Messina which so plagued Ulysses.<sup>46</sup> Book Four recalled the defeat of Pyrrhus, king of Epirus, who was descended from his namesake Pyrrhus, the son of the Greek hero of the Trojan war, Achilles. Finally in Book Five Boamund besieged Alexius at Larissa, which William reminds us was "the birthplace of Achilles, the executor of the destruction of Troy."<sup>47</sup> In each book there is a single reference to the story of Troy, and in most cases the underlying theme is that the Normans are about to have revenge upon the Greeks for the wrongs they did to the Trojans or their descendants. This continuity within the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* indicates that for the source of William's digression on Dyrrakhion we should look to his education rather than a common source to which Anna would later have access, indeed as I can find no source that includes *all* the details furnished by William and Anna, particularly the summarisation of the later troubles of Epidamnus and its revival, the most logical conclusion is that Anna copied this passage from the *Gesta*.

The other startling textual parallel between the *Alexiad* and the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* lies in the stratagem employed by Robert Guiscard to refloat his ships on the Glykys during a summer drought.

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<sup>43</sup>WA, I, 356-360, page 118.

<sup>44</sup>WA, I, 455-457, page 122.

<sup>45</sup>WA, II, 129-130, page 138.

<sup>46</sup>WA, III, 189-193, page 174.

<sup>47</sup>'*Produit hac auctor Troianae cladis Achilles.*' WA, V, 29, page 236.



With the return of summer there was a drought, and the channel had lost so much water that the sailors were powerless to refloat the ships on the river. The Duke, who could make a difficult task easy through ingenuity, recognised that the river lacked its accustomed flow, for the narrow channels of water flowed in restricted outlets. Having severed many branches from a tree he made many hurdles, and he filled these from above with sand; in this way the water which had dispersed wantonly was drawn into one channel. Hence the channel began to be deeper and fuller; the water had been drawn together to offer a navigable path by which the unharmed ships could be conveyed back to the waters of the sea.<sup>48</sup>

His ships, as I have said, were drawn up on land by the Glykys, but when after the winter and the coming of spring the weather became hotter and rainless, the water-level dropped; there was not the normal flow from the mountain streams. Consequently he was in an awkward situation; the ships could not be launched in the sea again. Despite his troubles, Robert, being a man of great intelligence and versatility, ordered piles to be driven in on either side of the river; these were then tightly bound with osiers; very tall trees were felled at the roots and laid behind these piles, and sand

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<sup>48</sup> *Temporis aestivi reditu defecit aquarum  
Copia, nec tantis iam defluit alveus undis,  
Ut fluvio nautae valeant deducere naves.  
Dux, qui difficilem facilem facit arte laborem,  
Dum fluvium solitis cognovit egere fluentis,  
Namque meatus aquae brevis arcta fauce fluebat,  
Multos afferri palos et ab amnis utraque  
Margine configi connexos vimine iussit,  
Et multis multa praecisis arbore ramis  
Composuit crates, et arenis desuper implet.  
Sic aqua lascive dispersa refertur in unum.  
Alveus altior hinc coepitque capacior esse,  
Cogitur unde viam praebere meabilis unda  
Navibus, illaesaque maris revehuntur ad undas.* WA, V, 241-254, pages 248-250.

was spread on them, in order to direct the flow into one course, concentrated so to speak in one canal formed by the stakes. Gradually pools formed and the water filled the whole of the artificial channel until it became deep enough to raise the ships, which had rested on the land and were now afloat. After that, when there was a good flow of water, the vessels were easily launched in the sea.<sup>49</sup>

Here both accounts establish first that a drought had lowered the water levels on the Glykys to such an extent that the ships could not be re-floated, both then praise Robert for his versatility before describing first the construction of hurdles and then their filling with sand to create false banks to narrow and deepen the flow of the river. Both chronicles end with a statement to the effect that Robert's scheme was effective and the ships reached the sea safely. While Anna Comnena places this event at a different time to William, in both cases the description of the stratagem follows an account of sickness and death in Robert's camp. Even Mathieu conceded that for this passage Anna has used a written source, but felt that "this source cannot be the *Gesta*. One of the Norman informers of Anna Comnena has been able to read it or report some extracts - but not the entire work."<sup>50</sup> Mathieu's dismissal of the *Gesta* as a source rests upon Anna's misplaced chronological setting of certain events, discussed in the greatest detail by Georgina Buckler, and more recently by Graham Loud.<sup>51</sup> On closer examination however these chronological discrepancies do not actually present any barrier to the *Gesta* being a source for Anna Comnena. Whatever amount of the *Gesta* Anna may have had, in whatever form, would have had to be reconciled with whatever other written information she had, or what she could recall from conversations with the men who knew her father.

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<sup>49</sup>AC, IV, iii, page 140; Leib, I, pages 149 - 150.

<sup>50</sup>Mathieu, page 46.

<sup>51</sup>Buckler, *Op. Cit.*, pages 406 - 414; Mathieu, pages 11 - 13; Loud, 'Anna Komnena and her Sources for the Normans of Southern Italy', pages 41- 52.

There is no reason to believe that she would, as we do with teleological hindsight, have automatically given William's work precedence over the oral/written accounts of men who were present during the campaign (one would assume that even with the envoy of the Archbishop of Bari as a source the majority of her material would come from the Greek camps, and thus chronological faults for various events in the western camp are hardly significant). Indeed given conflicting chronological sequences between a written source such as the *Gesta*, of which she had no certainty as to how its information was gathered, and the memories of men she knew to have been present, it is not surprising that Anna would choose to favour the latter sources for her chronological structure.<sup>52</sup> Chronological inconsistencies for the account of Robert Guiscard's Balkan expedition in the *Alexiad* are not a bar to the *Gesta* as one of Anna's sources.

Though less similar than the accounts of the two events given above, William and Anna's description of the reception of the pseudo-Michael by the inhabitants of Dyrrakhion also merits consideration:

They (the citizens of Dyrrakhion) promised that he (Robert) could enter the city, which he himself was attacking, for they would never refuse the face of Michael. Surrounded by the sound of horns, trumpets and lyres, the man who pretended to be Michael was brought out; he was led wreathed according to the imperial fashion, surrounded on every side by chanting crowds. All the citizens, when they saw him, derided the sight

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<sup>52</sup>Buckler comments on the tradition of attaching great importance to eyewitness accounts in Byzantine historiography and notes of Anna that "at every turn she tries to impress upon us that her knowledge is either taken from her own recollections or gained first hand from others who participated in the events." Buckler, *Op. Cit.*, page 230.

laughing, saying "This man, Lio, used to carry filled craters to the tables and was one of the more inferior cup bearers."<sup>53</sup>

"If we (the citizens of Dyrrakhion) see Michael and recognise him, we will without hesitation make obeisance before him and surrender the city.' Hearing this Robert immediately gave orders that 'Michael' should be dressed in magnificent robes and displayed to the citizens. He was led out with an imposing escort, loudly acclaimed with all kinds of musical instruments and cymbals, and shown to them. As soon as they saw him a thousand insults rained down on him from above; he was a complete stranger they yelled... ...With regard to the monk who accompanied Robert, most people had different views. Some announced that he was the cup-bearer of the Emperor Michael Ducas; others were certain that he was in fact the emperor Michael.<sup>54</sup>

In both accounts firstly the citizens agree to surrender the city if Robert shows them Michael, then Michael is led out with due pomp and ceremony, and finally he is identified as a cup-bearer. It is interesting that Anna, unlike William, records that there was obviously some similarity between the two men for she indicates that a number of people were fooled by the impostor. A further and extremely important similarity elsewhere in

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<sup>53</sup>*Illi promittunt urbis, quos ipse petebat,  
Ingressus numquam viso Michaelē negandos.  
Cornicinum sonitu circumdatus atque tubarum  
Et plectris, qui se Michaelē finxerat esse,  
More coronatus deducitur imperiali,  
Circumvallatus cantantibus undique turbis.  
Unanimi cives, hunc ut videre, cachinno  
Visum derident dicentes: "Iste solebant  
Crateras mensis plenos deferre Lio,  
Et de pincernis erat inferioribus unus."* WA, IV, lines 262 - 271, page 218.

<sup>54</sup>AC, IV, i, page 136; Leib, I, page 144.

the two accounts is the reason given in Anna and William's account for Robert's support of Michael Ducas:

"The Duke replied that he had come to them so that Michael, who had been deposed from the seat of power without cause, might be restored to honour"<sup>55</sup>

"...Palaeologus told them to ask from the top of the walls why he had come. 'To restore to his proper place of honour my kinsman Michael, who has been expelled from his empire...'"<sup>56</sup>

William's use here of the word *honour* is extremely significant. The term was "pregnant with meaning to a Westerner, denoting as it did a whole complex of rights associated with lordship." As can be seen above the *Alexiad* relates Robert's claims in parallel language, even including a literal translation of the Latin word *honour* which "looks decidedly odd in Greek and fails to convey the meaning of the original Latin."<sup>57</sup>

The similarities between the two records of the Balkans campaign are not limited to these three textual parallels. Both Anna and William's accounts of Robert's death, while differing in rhetorical style and too long to reproduce here, rest upon the basis of six events related in the same order:<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>*Dux venisse refert se, regni sede repulsus*

*Immerito Michael ut restituatur honori.* WA, IV, lines 260 - 261, page 218.

<sup>56</sup>AC, IV, i, page 136; Leib, I, page 144.

<sup>57</sup>I owe this revelation on the use of the word *honour* in both texts to an unpublished paper (from which the above quotations are taken) on the relationship between the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* and the *Alexiad* by James Howard-Johnston which approaches the problem from a slightly different angle. I did not become aware of the existence of Dr Howard-Johnston's paper until after I had completed the bulk of this chapter.

<sup>58</sup>The first three of these are discussed very briefly by Graham Loud. Loud, 'Anna Komnena and her Sources for the Normans of Southern Italy', pages 49 - 50.

Robert became ill at Kephallonia,<sup>59</sup>  
 while on his deathbed he was visited by his wife,<sup>60</sup>  
 after his death Roger Borsa announced to his troops that he had to return home,<sup>61</sup>  
 the fleet was caught in a tremendous storm during the crossing,<sup>62</sup>  
 Robert's corpse was almost lost,<sup>63</sup>  
 Robert was buried in the Venosa where his elder brothers had been laid to rest.<sup>64</sup>

These textual correlations stem from both authors' respective accounts of the Balkans campaigns, but perhaps more significant is the close factual relationship between Anna and William on events concerning Western history. Graham Loud commented that both Anna and William record that Robert Guiscard and Gregory VII met at Benevento when all other sources surviving for this meeting record that it took place at Ceprano or Aquino.<sup>65</sup> Both accounts then go on to say that the Pope offered to make Robert king, although William reports this as rumour. Before talking of the meeting at Benevento both accounts record the marriage of two of Robert Guiscard's daughters; one to Count Ráymon Berenguer II of Barcelona and the other to Count Ebelus II of Roucy.<sup>66</sup> The *Alexiad* even gives a similar account to William of the tensions in Germany, giving exactly the same figure of 30,000 dead which occurs in the *Gesta*.<sup>67</sup> These four similarities, reported in the same order, the first three unique to these two texts, combined with the textual parallels for the Balkans campaign render it implausible that Anna did not have

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<sup>59</sup>WA, V, lines 288 - 291, page 252; AC, VI, vi, pages 191 - 192; Leib, II, page 55.

<sup>60</sup>WA, V, lines 292 - 322, pages 252 - 254; AC, VI, vi, page 192; Leib, II, page 56.

<sup>61</sup>WA, V, lines 343 - 363, pages 254 - 256; AC, VI, vi, page 192; Leib, II, page 56.

<sup>62</sup>WA, V, lines 391 - 392, page 256; AC, VI, vi, page 192; Leib, II, page 56.

<sup>63</sup>WA, V, lines 393 - 397, pages 256 - 258; AC, VI, vi, page 192; Leib, II, page 56.

<sup>64</sup>WA, V, lines 397 - 403, page 258; AC, VI, vi, page 192; Leib, II, page 56.

<sup>65</sup>Loud, 'Anna Komnena and her Sources for the Normans of Southern Italy', page 51; WA, IV, lines 16 - 37, pages 204 - 206; AC, I, xiii, page 63; Leib, I, page 49.

<sup>66</sup>WA, IV, lines 8 - 15, page 204; AC, I, xii, page 61; Leib, I, pages 46 - 47.

<sup>67</sup>WA, IV, lines 52 - 61, page 206; AC, I, xiii, page 64; Leib, I page 50. I am indebted to James Howard-Johnston for this particular detail.

access to at least Books Four and Five of William's chronicle. In fact all the resemblances discussed above stem from those two books, which would explain why Anna made mistakes over the precise relationship between Boamund and Roger Borsa - that information is provided in Book Three of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*.

Setting aside for the moment the question of how Anna might have had access to the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* I should like to examine the question of whether she would have been able to understand the original Latin or if a Greek translation would have been necessary. Diehl believed that Anna had studied Latin, but could only voice this as a sentiment rather than a sound conclusion, for as Buckler observes she cites no Latin sources.<sup>68</sup> This is hardly a weighty argument against her however, for Michael Psellus, from whom Anna borrowed more passages than any other author and whom she undoubtedly admired, boasted of his knowledge of the language and yet never quoted a Latin author. While Psellus' *Chronographia* may have broken away from the format of all previous histories, even he would not go so far as to incorporate a Latin text.<sup>69</sup> Indeed what would be the point - the use of other works in Byzantine history writing served to demonstrate the author's breadth of knowledge; the inclusion of a passage of translated Latin would therefore be lost on his readership, even or especially on those who had Latin themselves, for literature of quality will never retain all its special nature in translation. To a Byzantine who prided himself on the fluidity and beauty of his speech and prose, the mutilation of a passage of well-phrased Latin by transcribing it into Greek would have been abhorrent. Thus it would be unusual for either Psellus or Anna Comnena to incorporate passages from classical Latin in their respective works and so the absence of these proves nothing. We know too little about the general education of the

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<sup>68</sup>"Enfin cette Byzantine semble - chose assez rare encore dans l'Orient de son temps - avoir su même le latin." C. Diehl, *Figures Byzantines II* (Paris, 1909), page 30; Buckler, *Op. Cit.*, page 179.

<sup>69</sup>Indeed one of the things that makes Psellus unique is that he borrows from no-one.



day, and in particular the education of Byzantine women, to say for certain that Anna had no Latin and what we do know of Anna herself indicates that she went out of her way to attain proficiency in fields of learning usually unavailable to women. Buckler's case that Anna had no Latin is exceptionally weak,<sup>70</sup> and Anna's own recorded difficulty with pronouncing barbarian names suggests nothing more than a common linguistic problem rather than an inability to comprehend a foreign tongue or indeed, more appropriately here perhaps, a foreign text. Furthermore Paul Magdalino's recent suggestion that we should read the *Alexiad* in the context of the Latinophile atmosphere of Manuel I Comnenus' court has shown that in many ways the text is a criticism of her nephew's policies in comparison to those of Anna's father.<sup>71</sup> While Magdalino has himself expressed the view that he would consider it highly unlikely that Anna had Latin, the heavily anti-Latin tone of her text, itself a criticism of the pro-Latin policies of Manuel I, renders it unlikely that Anna would boast of such knowledge. In the absence of concrete information we must follow either Diehl or Buckler in forming our own tenuous opinions.

The case for Anna having access to the *Gesta* is too strong to be dismissed, all that remains to be considered is how a copy of William's work might have fallen into her hands. This of course we can never know for sure, but there is one possible path which, though highly theoretical, remains compelling in its simplicity. The debt of Anna's *Alexiad* to her husband Nicephorus Bryennius is widely recognised, so much so that recently James Howard-Johnston argued a case for its being the work of the Byzantine general, reducing Anna's role to that of an editor, tidying together her late husband's

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<sup>70</sup>Buckler, *Op. Cit.*, page 179. Buckler claimed that Anna wrote as if the language needed an interpreter, but I can find no suggestion of this in the passage cited; AC, V, 8.

<sup>71</sup>P. Magdalino, 'The Pen of the Aunt: Echoes of the Mid-Twelfth Century in the *Alexiad*', in ed., T. Gouma-Peterson, *Anna Komnene and Her Times* (Garland, 2000) pages 15 - 44.

notes.<sup>72</sup> This important argument has been convincingly questioned by Ruth Macrides, but it is certainly indisputable that Anna, while doing a great deal of research and talking to veterans herself, must have inherited a large number of resources from her late husband who had initially taken on the task of writing a history of her father.<sup>73</sup> We know from Anna that in 1108 at Devol Boamund “asked to see Nicephorus Bryennius, my Caesar” and that it was through their talks that the Norman general was persuaded to accept Alexius’ terms.<sup>74</sup> Jonathon Shepard has observed that Anna deliberately chose to misrepresent in the *Alexiad* the closeness of the relationship between Boamund and Alexius, portraying him as a devious and dangerous rival - a Morriaty to Alexius’ Holmes, but it is curious that she omits to record why the former Crusader asks to see her husband.<sup>75</sup> To me Boamund’s request suggests a prior acquaintance, and thus perhaps a relationship between the two men that Anna would be keen to gloss over.

In the months prior to the First Crusade and indeed during the passage of the first Crusaders towards Constantinople, John Bryennius, Nicephorus’ father, was *Doux* of Dyrrakhion. Boamund was one of the few Crusaders who did not cross from Southern Italy to Dyrrakhion, the marshalling point for all the other Crusaders, choosing instead to land further south, but we should not forget that it was from Bari that the largest group of the Crusading army set sail. This southern Italian city had been the last bastion of Byzantine rule on the peninsula and was the natural if not only choice for the movement of the armies of the Northern Franks. Such a large movement of men between the two ports would have required extensive communication between the two harbour authorities

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<sup>72</sup>J. Howard-Johnston, ‘Anna Komnene and the *Alexiad*’, in ed., M. Mullett & D. Smythe, *Alexios I Komnenos* (Belfast, 1996), pages 260 - 302.

<sup>73</sup>R. Macrides, ‘The Pen and the Sword: Who wrote the *Alexiad*?’ in ed., T. Gouma-Peterson, *Anna Komnene and Her Times* (Garland, 2000), pages 63 - 82.

<sup>74</sup>AC, XIII, xi, pages 423 - 424; Leib, III, pages 124 - 125.

<sup>75</sup>J. Shepard, ‘When Greek meets Greek: Alexius Comnenus and Bohemond in 1097 - 98’, in *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 12 (Birmingham, 1988), pages 185 - 276.

and in particular between the 'rulers' of the two cities, John Bryennius and Boamund. The *Doux* certainly trusted Boamund enough for his men not to be required to marshal at Dyrrakhion and have minimal supervision compared with the other armies on their way to Constantinople.<sup>76</sup> Later, in Constantinople, as Shepard clearly illustrates, it is evident that Boamund was a major player in the finalising of the relationship between the Crusaders and Alexius.<sup>77</sup> It is possible therefore that Boamund either asked for Bryennius because of his good relations with his father, or because of an undisclosed relationship stemming from that acquaintance which may have been fostered in those months at Constantinople. Boamund, as a ruling scion of the family whose regime the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* celebrated, would certainly have had a copy of William's work and most likely have had one with him - for what could be better than an epic of heroic battles (particularly against Greeks) to entertain his nobles while on campaign? It is not hard to believe that at Devol in 1108 Nicephorus Bryennius received a copy of the *Gesta* from Boamund. For such a gift to be given we have to believe that Bryennius could understand Latin.<sup>78</sup> Buckler believed that Nicephorus Bryennius could not understand the Crusaders, for Anna records that

"he refrained from shooting straight at the Latins, yet whenever one of them in his foolhardiness and arrogance not only fired at the defenders on

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<sup>76</sup>J. France, *Victory in the East: A military history of the First Crusade* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), page 107. I would suggest that the antagonism between Boamund and Raymond of Toulouse may have been the reason for Boamund not marshalling at Dyrrakhion (although this could have been at Bryennius' request to avoid putting intolerable strain on the local resources). Although differences between the two men are clearer later in the Crusade it is perhaps noteworthy that Raymond chose the longer coastal route rather than taking his army through Boamund's lands and using the port of Bari.

<sup>77</sup>Shepard, *Op. Cit.*, pages 185 - 276.

<sup>78</sup>Anna says of Bryennius that "the Caesar was a man of learning and in his writings gave proof of it... He was a magnificent soldier, but by no means unmindful of literature; he read all books and by closely studying every science derived much wisdom from them, both ancient and modern." AC, VII, ii, page 220; Leib, II, page 91.

the ramparts, but seemingly poured forth a volley of insults in his own language as well, the Caesar did bend his bow.”<sup>79</sup>

But this passage does not show that the Caesar could not understand the Latins - for they were at arrow-distance - he would not have been able to hear them; it was their body language which caused them to seemingly pour forth a volley of insults. Even if Bryennius could hear the soldiers, and I do not think the text indicates that this was the case, this fails to prove that he could not read or understand Latin, only that he could not comprehend the particular dialect of the men facing him. Boamund is portrayed in both eastern and western sources as a man of ready tongue and wit, and the irony of presenting Bryennius with a gift celebrating the deeds of the one man who came closest to destroying Alexius’ regime would probably have amused him.<sup>80</sup>

Anna describes her *Alexiad* in her preface as a continuation of the task which had been laid down upon her husband Bryennius by her mother, of which he had completed but a ‘final draft’ of the events leading up to the times of the Emperor Nicephorus Botaneiates.<sup>81</sup> Only Books Four and Five of the *Gesta* bear direct relevance to such a project, and thus we could surmise that had Bryennius only prepared “half-finished and hastily put together” notes of what he had thus far gathered of events from then on, while busily engaged in his usual affairs of state, he would only have bothered to translate those two texts for easier reference. This is a pretty if impossible to

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<sup>79</sup>Buckler, *Op. Cit.*, pages 185 - 186. AC, X, ix, page 322; Leib, II, pages 224 - 225.

<sup>80</sup>While ultimately Robert Guiscard lost his campaign and his life in the Balkans we should not forget that according to William of Apulia Boamund was the Commander in Chief until his illness and subsequent departure - up until which the progress of the campaign had been predominantly positive. The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, while praising Alexius as a soldier, celebrates his defeats by Boamund. William informs us of Boamund that “no setback could frighten the soul of that man” (V, lines 53 - 54) - the presentation of William’s work allows Boamund to laugh at himself and at Alexius at the same time, easing the tensions between them, whilst being a powerful reminder of his value to the Byzantine emperor. I cannot think of a more pertinent or intelligent gift of reconciliation.

<sup>81</sup>AC, Preface, pages 18 - 20.

prove theory but there is one tantalising piece of anecdotal information in Bryennius' own surviving work which raises certain questions; when describing the deeds of his ancestor he commented that "if my account had no other aim than to narrate his deeds in full it would be necessary to write another *Illiad*."<sup>82</sup> Ruth Macrides has suggested that Anna may have gained her idea for her chosen form of the *Alexiad* from this,<sup>83</sup> but might not this have occurred to Bryennius because of his familiarity with the epic form and Trojan associations of William's *Gesta*?

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<sup>82</sup>*Nicephori Bryennios Histoire*, ed., P. Gautier (Brussels, 1975), pages 17-18.

<sup>83</sup>Macrides, *Op. Cit.*, page 70.

## Conclusion

Through its role models and racial stereotypes the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* gives us such a rich picture of its contemporary society that it is easy to forget that it is a view largely false and blinkered both by its deliberate emphasis on the relations between two racial groups - the Normans and Greeks - and its focus on those matters that would interest its educated audience. The emphases of the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* reflect the concerns of its patrons: a reiteration of the legitimisation of the Hauteville family, the promotion of the authority of the Papacy, and the idealisation of the Crusading movement. As a result of this William gives us detailed pictures of the traits desirable in lords, soldiers and priests - but has very little to tell us of labourers, merchants and artisans, or of family life. In his account of the establishment of Norman power on the peninsula, through his concentration on the success in the ousting of the rule of a foreign power - the Byzantine Empire - William is able to subsume the subversion of the original aristocratic rebellion against that authority by the Norman settlers, thus rendering a chronicle acceptable to both the Normans and those native elements that had succeeded in maintaining power under the Norman yoke. The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* is thus a distorting mirror shaped by both the aristocratic orientation of its subject matter and the need to gloss over the divisions of the past society through the legitimising of a new order for an audience composed of both. But while a distorting mirror may not always give the clearest picture, by reflecting different angles than those to which the eye is accustomed it often reveals aspects and details that would hitherto have gone unnoticed.

This thesis has shown that at the time of its commission the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* was intended to fulfil several extremely important roles. It supported and attempted to

further legitimise in the eyes of its contemporaries both the reform papacy and the dominance of the Hauteville family in southern Italy and the personal authority of Roger Borsa in particular. It also promoted the ideals of religious warfare and (initially at least) attempted to portray the current Byzantine Emperor, Alexius I Comnenus, in a light favourable to his western contemporaries. Furthermore it was written in such a fashion that it could be appreciated by audiences outside of southern Italy, in particular the aristocracies of Normandy and France whose cultural values it shared. The author's skilful emphasis on battles and stratagems related in exciting epic style rather than the mundane details of government and international politics should have ensured that the message its patrons wished to convey would reach a wide audience. Why then do so few copies of the *Gesta* survive? The answer to this question lies in the very purpose of the text.

The *Gesta* has long been recognised as a work which promoted the legitimacy and authority of the Apulian Duke Roger Borsa; only now has its value for Boamund and Roger of Sicily been explained. In the settlement of Bari in 1089 the lands of Robert Guiscard were effectively split into two equal halves between Roger Borsa and his elder half brother Boamund, and although Boamund effectively had autonomous control of his own lands, technically he remained his brother's vassal. William's poem effectively promoted both men, but within thirty years of its completion Roger Borsa's son, William, died intestate, and the title of Duke passed to his cousin, Roger II of Sicily. There was therefore subsequently little need for the Dukes of Apulia to wish to circulate a history which celebrated the rise and legitimacy of a different branch of the family. Boamund's reputation was probably even further strengthened by the *Gesta* than that of his brother, but by the time of its completion this was largely academic: Boamund's successes on the First Crusade and his subsequent stance against Alexius Comnenus made him one of the most celebrated names in the West. Boamund's reputation from the First Crusade until



his death was probably so strong that he no longer needed a poem which extolled the virtues of Robert Guiscard to shore up his authority - the son had surpassed his father. If Boamund desired a history which promoted him as both a warrior, devout Christian and leader of men, he needed to look no further than the *Gesta Francorum et Aliorum Hierosolimitanorum*, written at the same time as William's poem. The virtues of Roger of Sicily were also extolled by William, primarily because of his conquest of that island which the Marmoutier monk portrayed as a war of religions. But Roger of Sicily had commissioned his own history, the *De rebus Gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae Comitis et Roberti Guiscardi Ducis fratris eius* of Geoffrey Malaterra, finished within months of William's poem - there was thus no reason for either Roger or his descendants to use William's work to shore up their authority. In any event Roger's direct line ended in 1189 with the death of King William II of Sicily, thereafter there was little reason to continue to reproduce either chronicle - the Hauteville reign in the south had ended, a short yet colourful chapter in the history of the peninsula.

William's other patron, Urban II died before the *Gesta* was completed, but could his text be of any further use for his successors? Sadly it is likely that for the papacy William's poem was even less useful than it was for the Hauteville family. Though Urban died before its completion, the sheer success of the First Crusade bolstered the authority of his successors against their German rivals. Urban himself would probably have been elated at the recovery of Jerusalem (which he may not have imagined as being possible) but devastated at the irrevocable damage done to the careful entente he had tried to form between the Eastern and Western Churches. Even William's poem, with its gradual invective against Alexius Comnenus in the final book, turned aside from the policy he had tried to pursue. The number of chronicles available to incite crusading spirit with details of the events of the First Crusade in the east meant that the *Gesta's* subtle portrayal of the

conquest of Palermo and explanation of the tribulations in the east was redundant. After the fall of Jerusalem in 1099 the *Gesta* was no longer relevant as a political tool for the papacy.

The epilogue of William of Apulia's poem conveys perhaps the Marmoutier monk's sense that his work had been deprived by events of its intended purpose and wider audience. One of his patrons was dead, the First Crusade was essentially over (and the stories filtering through from the East were filled with sufficient examples of religious fervour and martial glory to inspire the market he had aimed to tap), the only authority that the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* could now serve was that of Roger Borsa. A poet whose work illustrated some of the finest skills of writing of the age depended solely on the pleasure of one man for reward

You know, Roger, that I have written these verses for you. The poet has joyfully done his best to fulfil your instructions. Authors always deserve cheerful benefactors. You, my Duke, are worthier than the Roman Duke Octavian. Be for me, I beseech you, the hope of some good, as he was for Maro.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Nostra, Rogere, tibi, cognoscis carmina scribi.*

*Mente tibi laeta studuit parere poeta.*

*Semper et auctores hilares meruere datores:*

*Tu duce Romano dux dignior Octaviano,*

*Sis mihi, quaeso, boni spes, ut fuit ille Maroni.*' WA, Epilogue, lines 410 - 414, page 258.

## Appendix A

### **Boamund, Alexius Comnenus and the First Crusade. A brief outline of an alternative view.**

Whatever the precise nature of Urban II's appeal at Clermont or Alexius Comnenus' request for western mercenary aid, it is clear that neither man would have desired the presence of ill led troops within the borders of the Byzantine Empire. Whatever the size and nature of the force that would move east, both men would have wished for an intelligent and experienced commander who would have been able to work with the Byzantines. In Boamund we find a major southern Italian noble who had considerable experience of both Byzantine and Seljuq tactics and who had proved his worth in the field, not only in the common siege warfare of the day but also in the organisation and fighting of a major campaign. We also find a man who was known personally to Urban II and who had dealt with Alexius Comnenus in the past. With these facts in mind it is possible to re-examine the events of the First Crusade and build a concrete case from the surviving evidence that there was a close relationship between Boamund and Alexius which was obfuscated by the later acrimony between the two men. Furthermore, in the light of this, it becomes possible to see an alternative reason for Boamund's behaviour towards his fellow Crusaders at Antioch and the reason why he held on to that vital Byzantine outpost.

The first evidence of some form of prior accommodation between Boamund and Alexius Comnenus lies in the approach of Boamund's southern Italian army to Constantinople. In his military history of the Crusade France commented that the journey of Boamund's men to Constantinople took 178 days, travelling at an average of

five kilometres a day - in comparison with the larger army of Raymond of Toulouse whose forces moved at twice the speed.<sup>1</sup> He also noted that Boamund's troops landed south of the other Crusading armies, and unlike them did not travel with a large military escort.<sup>2</sup> Boamund's army probably travelled without an escort because, unlike the other armies, it did not need it - Alexius was already well aware of the Norman's intentions. The slow progress would have allowed plenty of communication between the Emperor and Boamund before the latter's arrival at Constantinople - communication which, if the *Estorie de Jérusalem et d'Antioche*<sup>3</sup> is to be believed, began prior to his departure from Italy.<sup>4</sup> Boamund himself departed from his army - arriving in Constantinople a month before - an action that displays great trust in the Emperor. But if he was negotiating with Alexius - what were the two of them arranging?

It has been convincingly argued that Alexius was as much an instigator of the First Crusade as Urban II, even if the end result was not quite what he had originally envisaged.

<sup>5</sup> The relationship between Alexius and the Crusaders hinges over the question of the oaths that were exchanged between the two parties, a topic that has been the subject of much historical debate.<sup>6</sup> Pryor took the view (based on the circumstances in which the

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<sup>1</sup>J. France, *Victory in the East: A military history of the First Crusade*, (Cambridge, 1994), page 107.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup>*Li Estorie de Jérusalem et d'Antioche*, in *Recueil des Historiens Occidentaux V* (Paris, 1967), pages 627-628.

<sup>4</sup>As mentioned in Chapter V, Boamund would certainly have been involved in the organisation of the movement of most of the Crusaders to the East since they travelled from his own port of Bari.

<sup>5</sup>J. Shepard, 'Aspects of Byzantine attitudes and Policy towards the West in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries', in ed., J. Howard-Johnston, *Byzantium and the West c.800 - c.1200*, (Amsterdam, 1988) pages 102-15; *idem*, 'When Greek meets Greek: Alexius Comnenus and Boamund in 1097-8', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 12, (Birmingham, 1988), pages 185-277; *idem*, "'Father" or "Scorpion"? Style and substance in Alexios' diplomacy,' in eds., M. Mullett and D. Smythe, *Alexios I Komnenos*, (Belfast 1996), pages 69-132; *idem*, 'Cross-purposes: Alexius Comnenus and the First Crusade', in ed., J. Philips, *The First Crusade - origins and impact*, (Manchester, 1997), pages 107-129; P. Charanis, 'Byzantium, the West and the origin of the First Crusade', *Byzantion* XLIX, (Brussels, 1949) pages 17 - 36; P. Magdalino, *The Byzantine background to the First Crusade*, (Toronto, 1996).

<sup>6</sup>Two recent extremes in this debate, both with their merits and shortcomings, are articles by Pryor and Shepard. Pryor, J.H., 'The oaths of the leaders of the First Crusade to Emperor Alexius I Comnenus', *Parergon* II, (University of Sydney, 1984). Shepard, J., 'When Greek meets Greek: Alexius Comnenus

sources were written, the terminology employed, the lack of any evidence that Alexius provided fiefs and the lack of any reaction from any of the crusaders' lords over the oaths sworn) that the Crusaders only swore fealty to Alexius; that is that they simply swore to respect his person and property, in return Alexius promised "good faith and security."<sup>7</sup> Shepard, on the other hand, more recently asserted that all the crusading 'princes' became the emperor's vassals. In the light of Pryor's discourse on the oaths, Shepard's theory that all the crusading leaders became vassals seems improbable, but his argument that Boamund in particular entered into a special relationship with Alexius remains relatively untouched. Of all the crusading leaders Boamund is the only one who is described as becoming Alexius' vassal and performing homage,<sup>8</sup> the other Crusaders are referred to as having simply rendered fealty. The author of the *Gesta Francorum* mentions only fealty initially, but then says that Raymond was asked to "do homage and swear fealty as the others had done."<sup>9</sup> When William of Tyre, writing later than many of the other chroniclers, ascribed one form of ceremony to Boamund and another to the other crusaders he is not, as Pryor suggests, confused, but instead extremely accurate. The anonymous author of the *Gesta Francorum*, a member of Boamund's party, makes the natural assumption of someone outside of the upper echelons of command that the other leaders made identical oaths to that of his own lord. This explanation of events puts forward an alternative interpretation to the extremes propagated by Shepard and Pryor, is supported by the variety of terms describing the oaths in the various accounts, the evidence in the *Gesta* that Boamund did receive a fief<sup>10</sup> and the theory outlined by

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and Boamund in 1097-8', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* XII, (Birmingham, 1988).

<sup>7</sup>GF, page 12.

<sup>8</sup>He is described thus by William of Tyre who says that Boamund rendered "fealty by the hands" ("*factus est, ut dicitur, dominus Boamundus Imperatoris homo, fidelitate manualiter exhibita et juramento praestito corporaliter*"), while other Crusaders are referred to as having simply rendered fealty. William of Tyre, c.f. Pryor, J.H., *op. cit.*, pages 128-9.

<sup>9</sup>"...ut faceret ei hominum et fiduciam sicut alii fecerant." GF, page 13.

<sup>10</sup>"so he (the emperor) told Boamund that he would give him lands beyond Antioch, fifteen days' journey in length and eight in width, provided that he would swear fealty with free consent, and he added this promise, that if Boamund kept his oath faithfully he would never break his own." GF, page

Shepard that Boamund had a more direct relationship with Alexius than any of the other crusaders. This view is corroborated by Anna Comnena's account of the oath taken by Boamund at Devol in 1108 in which Boamund stated that

I am the liege man of both Your Majesties, renewing as it were that which has been rescinded.<sup>11</sup>

With this interpretation of events the course of the First Crusade comes into a far sharper focus. An understanding that Boamund was the only 'prince' on the crusade that was a vassal of Alexius makes the constant position of his forces near those of Taticius, the commander of the Byzantine contingent, understandable.<sup>12</sup> It indicates why only with Boamund's arrival at Nicaea were the Crusaders' supply problems alleviated. It also explains why it would be to Boamund that Taticius ceded the three towns of Tursol, Mamistra and Adana on his departure from Antioch for more supplies or direct military aid, and why Taticius would heed Boamund's advice if there was a crusader plot against the Byzantine representative as Anna Comnena suggests, and why Boamund himself would warn Taticius.

But if Boamund was such a close supporter of the Emperor - why would he press a claim for Antioch before it was certain that the Emperor had abandoned them? It is probable that he didn't. Boamund received guarantees of imperial aid in the form of the three towns ceded to him, and from the moment Taticius left the siege he represented Alexius in negotiations with the other Crusaders - a fact not fully understood by all the

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12. Note that Alexius does not promise Boamund Antioch. Such a gift would have been explicitly mentioned.

<sup>11</sup>AC, XIII, xii, page 425.

<sup>12</sup>Anna Comnena tells us that Taticius had had prior experience of commanding western troops - in particular against Abul Kasim. AC, VI, x, page 203.



accounts, obfuscated by his later breach with the Emperor. The *Gesta Francorum* clearly shows that his original request to hold Antioch was not rejected by the other Crusaders in respect of Alexius' rights, but because of their own desire, following their inability to pillage Nicaea, to gain much needed income from Antioch. "This city shall not be granted to anyone, but we will all share it alike; as we have had equal toil, so let us have equal honour."<sup>13</sup> We should consider the possibility that Boamund asked for Antioch as Alexius' representative and was initially refused as such. Eventually, in desperation, the Crusaders - with the exception of the most anti-Byzantine Raymond of Toulouse - acceded to his plan. When Alexius, because of his acceptance of the false reports of the deserter Stephen of Blois, failed to assist the Crusaders with further troops, a clash resumed over possession of the city. By then Boamund had already had control of the greater part of Antioch, which would have made its division awkward, and besides pressure from the lower echelons of the army forced the leaders to move on. The circumstances of Alexius' withdrawal would have constituted a great personal embarrassment to Boamund - indicated in his missive to Paschal II - by which Alexius had broken, in western terms, his obligations as a Lord - thus freeing Boamund from the duties of a vassal.<sup>14</sup> Boamund's letter to Alexius, related by Anna Comnena, refutes the Emperor's accusations of breaking faith:

I myself am not responsible for these things, but you. You promised to follow us with a strong force, but you were unwilling to back your pledges

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<sup>13</sup>*Nemini dimittetur haec civitas, sed omnes aequaliter habebimus illam. Sicut aequalem habuimus laborem, sic inde aequalem habeamus honorem.* GF, pages 44-45.

<sup>14</sup>Interestingly enough Anna Comnena's version of the Treaty of Devol ends with the phrase "and you, emperors ever-revered with the titles of Sebastos and Augustus of the Roman Empire, will doubtless observe the clauses written in the Chrysobull of Your Majesties and will keep your promises to the letter." While the text gives details of the lands and income that Boamund is to receive, there is nothing that could be really be interpreted as the 'promises' that he refers to, suggesting that Anna may well have deliberately edited a section of the Chrysobull to obfuscate the fact that Alexius may have had obligations to Boamund which, if unfulfilled, would render their agreement null and void. AC, XIII, xii, page 433.



by action. As for us, after our arrival at Antioch, for three months with great suffering we contended with the enemy and with a famine unsurpassed in living memory, so bad that most of us were even reduced to eating meats forbidden by the law. Nevertheless we held on as best we could, and while we were doing that, Your Majesty's servant Taticius, who had been appointed to help, abandoned us in our peril and went away. Contrary to expectation we did take the city and routed the enemy which came from Chorosan to aid the men of Antioch. How, tell me, can it be right for us so lightly to renounce what we have won by our own sweat and toil?<sup>15</sup>

In conclusion, the question of why Boamund participated in the first Crusade remains - was it a personal decision - impulsive or premeditated, or an action planned with Urban II and maybe even Alexius I before Clermont? His peaceful reception in the East suggests that Alexius certainly expected him. What is clear is that it is time to move on from the biased interpretation of events that have haunted his actions since Anna Comnena's damning condemnation. The sources indicate that there was an extremely close relationship between Alexius I and Boamund, which both tried hard to maintain until the betrayal of Stephen of Blois's desertion from the siege of Antioch caused Alexius to withdraw his military aid - an action which, from a western perspective, broke the bonds of vassalage between him and Boamund - and perhaps more importantly, created a legacy of distrust between Byzantium and the West over the Levant.

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<sup>15</sup>AC,XI, ix, page 358.

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